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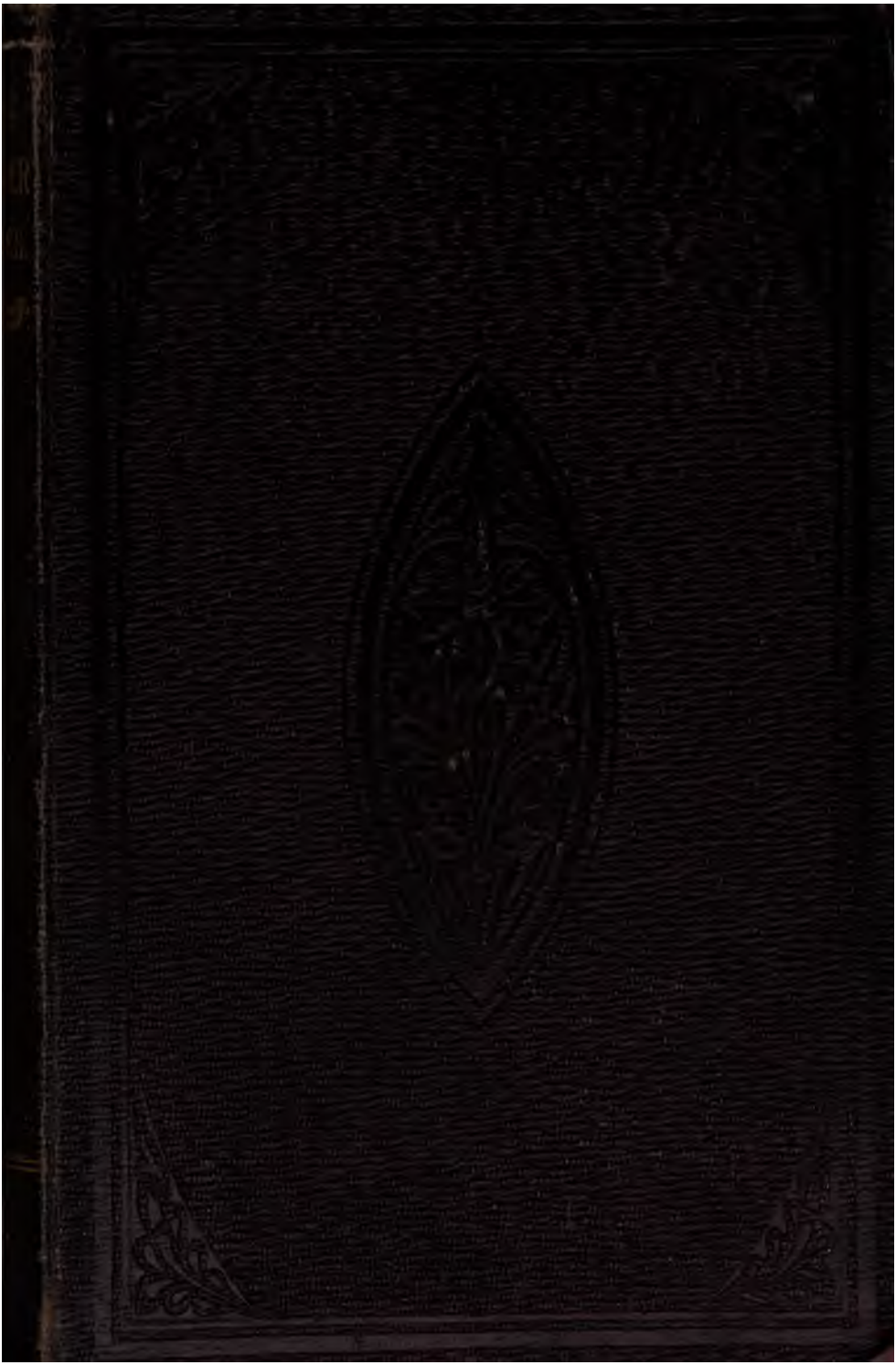

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GILBERT MASSENGER.

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GILBERT MASSENGER.

By HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF "THORNEY HALL," "MAUDE TALBOT."

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

"Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's troubled main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again."

LONGFELLOW.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER & CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1855.

249. w. 144.

GILBERT MASSENGER.

I.

THERE was an awful silence in the chamber of Andrew Massenger, lawyer in Ashton-le-Forde upwards of fifty years. For some days he had lain in a dull lethargy; it was a doubtful question whether he would regain consciousness any more or not. His daughter sat erect and gray in an arm-chair near the fire, listening to the loud beat of a clock in the corner opposite, which kept time with the sick man's heavy breathing, and doled out his few remaining earthly seconds with slow, niggard hand. A little before midnight, with a prolonged sigh, he awoke. It was the lighting up before death.

"Where is the lad Gilbert? Bring him here," he said hoarsely, and with great difficulty.

The woman left the room, and presently returned, carrying in her arms a young child, who was only restrained from crying aloud by intense fear; his eyes fixed with a kind of fascination on the dying man's worn face, and he passively submitted to be placed on the bed beside him. Andrew Massenger laid a heavy hand on his grandson's arm, and cried out, in a tone that carried awe to both the listeners' hearts—

"He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall come to his end in the midst of his days, and"—he paused as if consciousness were again forsaking him; a minute after he spoke again as strongly and distinctly as before—"I have acted fairly by all men; I have never defrauded the widow or the fatherless." A painful spasm convulsed his features; his knotted hands were clenched till the veins started like cords; his eyes wandered vaguely:—"Yes, I have been just in all my dealings, and justice is what I ask for myself; strict justice—nothing more: justice to the letter!" And with an agonized stare, as if he had caught a sight of that justice which he so vehemently demanded, he fell back on his pillow, dead.

Andrew Massenger had been what is emphatically called a hard man. In his life there was no honour; and his daughter, with the harsh, uncompromising truth of the Calvinistic creed which she held, sternly averred that in his death there was no hope.

II.

Gilbert Massenger had lost both his parents, and being at the time of his grandfather's death only five years old, the charge of him naturally devolved on his aunt and sole relative, Gertrude Massenger. She was a woman considerably past middle age, of a cold, fanatical disposition, who lived continually, as she herself expressed it, within the shadow of death, being afflicted with a disease which might, at any moment, smite her without warning, and terminate her life.

Her habits were frugal to parsimony, whilst her charities were large, but secret. She read no book save the Bible, and dwelt most on those passages which denounce vengeance on the wicked, and judgment to come.

Gilbert's mind received its early tincture from

this gloom. He had learnt many awful narratives from the daily readings to which he listened. In his bed at night he would lie awake, trembling as he thought of them; his imagination amplified each detail. He saw Cain—the man on whom God had set a mark—driven forth from the society of his kind, wandering over the accursed earth, his brother's blood crying unto him from the ground: he saw the liars struck dead, carried out, and buried: he saw Dives grievously tormented: he saw the wailing throng of souls on the left hand—the outer darkness, the weeping and gnashing of teeth: then insensibly his mind struggled back to one picture —mysterious, yet vividly distinct—the death of his grandfather; and it seemed to him dark and awful as any of those Scripture stories.

He was brought up in the bondage of fear; not in the tender restraints of love. What might have been the effects of such a training on a child of weak moral or physical constitution, it is not difficult to conjecture; but, fortunately, Gilbert was hardy both in mind and body. He grew and strengthened amidst the dispiriting influences of his aunt's house with as much vigour as the rugged

thorn will do on a bleak moorland waste. Its gnarled branches take many an obstinate twist, which show how it has bent to the prevalent winds, yet still in spring it is richly sheeted with blossoms, whose grace and beauty are all the more conspicuous from the sterility around; and to tired travellers, on the sultry mid-day track, it gives a fragrant, sheltered rest.

Gertrude Massenger meant to do her duty by her nephew, as by the rest of the world: her manner of doing it was an error in judgment. She started with the idea that every impulse of his natural heart must be vicious; that he would be prone to lying, and other debasing vices, which would call for sharp correction. The sturdy independence with which the lad early repelled and resented her accusations and suspicions, she considered as a sinful pride that must be chastened out of him: yet the severe measure of her discipline did not succeed in breaking or cowing his high spirit. The battle between them was long and hardly contested; an incident that occurred when Gilbert was about nine years old brought it to a close, and left the victory with him.

III.

Miss Massenger had a favourite cat by which she set great store; this cat, for reasons unknown, was very obnoxious to Gilbert. One evening, as the two were sitting down to their frugal tea in the dark, disfurnished parlour which, in her habitual self-mortification, it pleased Miss Massenger to inhabit, puss came trotting in, mewing most piteously, with cockle-shells fastened to his paws.

"*You* have done this, Gilbert!" cried his aunt.

"No, indeed I did not," answered the boy sturdily.

"I do not believe you: go away from table; you shall not have a morsel to eat until you confess."

Gilbert moved back his chair without speaking, and resumed his book in the twilight window. At half an hour's end, being still obdurate, he was ordered to bed.

"That child's spirit must and shall be broken; if it is not, he will go straight to perdition," said

Miss Massenger to herself as she sat by the fire afterwards, caressing her outraged cat.

With her to accuse and condemn were one act; the more she thought about the matter, the harder her heart grew. She turned over in her mind the grave responsibilities forced upon her, and felt persuaded that her present iron despotism was the only right way of fulfilling them.

The whole of the next day she kept Gilbert in sight, lest her servant, Mittie, should venture to supply his wants in disobedience to orders; and, as before, he was sent to bed at dusk.

The following morning he was very still, and did not attempt to amuse himself. The struggle became exciting; his aunt had not looked for this firm, passive resistance, and she could not understand it: to all her questions, repeated at short intervals throughout the day, he returned only the same steadfast denial. Evening came, and he again went to his room, but now evidently sickening from inanition.

"He cannot hold out much longer, surely," thought Miss Massenger, whose feeling of virtuous perseverance was yielding to a natural anxiety for

the success of her discipline, and a doubt of its effects.

She sat over her tea much longer than usual, being quite alone, and much disturbed in her mind about the lad; she would willingly have cancelled her threat if it could have been done without compromising the truth. While reflecting thus, the parlour door burst open, and Mittie rushed in unceremoniously, exclaiming with a mixture of wrath and triumph—" It wasn't Gilbert! I was sure of it; and now I have caught that limb of mischief next door doing it!" and she turned puss out of her apron on the carpet, with his feet encumbered as before.

After a few questions asked and satisfactorily answered, Miss Massenger acknowledged that she had been too hasty in condemning Gilbert; and now, really sorry for the suffering he had so bravely endured, she took some bread and milk in her hand, and went immediately up-stairs.

She came to his bedside, and stood for a few seconds looking at him in some embarrassment. He lay with his face upward; it was rather pale, and a purple circle below the eyes made it appear

still more so; a slight moisture on his eye-lashes betrayed that, quiet and apparently unsubdued as he had been, the child had cried himself to sleep. At the first sound of her voice he awoke, looked at her, but neither moved nor spoke.

"Gilbert, I have been mistaken," said his aunt, not without hesitation; "you did not tell me a lie, as I thought: sit up and eat something."

She lifted him upon her knees, and held him fast while she offered the food she had brought: for a minute he seemed bewildered; but, taking the bread from her hand, he struggled out of her arms, and sat down on the floor to eat it. A few mouthfuls satisfied him; then he got back into his bed without having uttered a word.

Miss Massenger lingered, wishing he would speak; she smoothed the clothes, and put out her hand to lift from his forehead the mass of dark curls which had fallen over it; but he shrank from her touch as if he expected a blow—an action painfully suggestive, and which sent her back to the parlour with more doubts of her system of training than had ever troubled her before. If Gilbert did not hate her, as certain was it that all

her cares, anxieties, and rebukes, had not taught him to love her.

She anticipated their meeting in the morning with anything but pleasant feelings. Would Gilbert assume a triumphant air, and defy her authority henceforth and for ever? It was more than possible: he must be conscious of his advantage.

Again she was at fault in her calculations. He came into the parlour, ate his breakfast, listened to the usual chapters, and brought out his lesson-books for the day with the silent promptitude to which his aunt had trained him. Was this mere callous indifference, deep-lying resentment, or the self-respecting act of a great, strong, generous heart? Miss Massenger was completely baffled: she tried to speak about the affair, and again expressed her regret. Gilbert made no answer: perhaps this last injustice appeared to him no greater than many another whose issue had been against him.

"Some boys would have confessed, to escape the punishment," said his aunt.

He glanced up in her face with a quick scrutiny unnatural in a child so young, then replied, as his

eyes returned to his book, "I would have been starved to death first."

A throb of gratification filled the stern woman's heart: this was the unwavering spirit of rectitude she had longed to plant in her nephew's breast; she took to herself, therefore, all the credit, little thinking how in a nature more plastic she would as assuredly have sown seeds of hypocrisy, low cunning, and all their attendant vices, by the same system whose early fruits in him were fruits of high promise.

A few weeks after the incident recorded above she announced to Gilbert that it was now time he went to school: hitherto she had taught him herself. To school accordingly he went; nothing loth.

IV.

Ashton-le-Forde is generally considered an aristocratic little town; it has no manufactures and not much trade, and is therefore quiet, although the annual race and the charity balls draw together the gentry for ten miles round.

The parish church is large; but the architect, having projected the building of a handsome spire, was stopped midway by the lack of funds, and the result is, to the eye of strangers, a corpulent factory-chimney, which overtops every other object in the town. Hence, chance comers are apt to think that Ashton is a Manchester in embryo, and to make inquiries respecting its prospects; when the case being explained to them, they invariably ask why the townspeople do not raise a subscription to complete the spire.

Nobody can undertake to answer this question.

The fact is, they are not an enterprising or subscribing people. Some there are amongst them who may be said to wrap themselves in their wealth; but no portion of their rich garment is extended to cover any limbs besides their own; their poor *are* poor, their ignorant *are* ignorant: no night-schools, no ragged-schools have sprung up to make a glimmer through the thick darkness. What did for their forefathers will do for them; and they are contented so long as innovation leaves them alone. The unsightly and incomplete spire might be sent to Parliament as their representative.

V.

The grammar-school of Ashton-le-Forde is a quaint, Gothic building, in a state of most picturesque dilapidation; the cloisters have green moss on their crumbling pillars, and unpruned ivy encroaches half over the lozenge-paned church-like windows. There is always a stray gust or two wandering about the Hall in chilly weather; mysterious noises are said to proceed from behind the worm-eaten wainscot, and to rumble beneath the uneven floor; the wind and rain hold ghostly council in the yawning chimneys, and the tall elm-tree, just outside the eastern window, sways its branches against the glass, like some giant spectre, tired of being out in the night, and demanding to seat himself by the hearth whose ruddy glow shines up upon the panes. Small boys are never willing to be left in the Hall after school is out, for there is more terror in the legends of the place than even in the Doctor's birch; and if, by chance, some young loiterer is left in, he is always observed to

say his lesson aloud, and to strike his heels against the floor, with the view, it is supposed, of keeping up his courage.

The building is very lonely; it adjoins the church, and the play-ground is bounded on the one side by the river, and on the other by the grave-yard, whilst a high wall shuts it in from the bridge and the street. At this place the river, though rapid, is shallow: in summer, or during a long drought, the boys can wade through it, and it is almost always passable across the stepping-stones which have been there from time immemorial.

The school was built and endowed by Sir Giles Monckton, Knight, thrice mayor of Ashton-le-Forde, for the maintenance and education of fifteen poor scholars; but the charity has long been alienated from its original purpose. There are, it is true, a certain number of boys on the foundation who receive their instruction free; but these are elected from the upper class of students: the choristers of the High Church have no longer the privilege of sitting on the same bench as the sons of wealthy citizens, or of conning the Latin grammar under the ferule of a doctor of divinity.

There is an odour of sanctity and respectability about the ancient Hall that makes the boys proud of belonging to it; men who have been brought up there always seem to retain for it a kind of reverential affection. Two or three world-known names there are, rudely carved on the oaken wainscot, and young enthusiasts, when cutting theirs in such goodly company, secretly hope that they also may one day become an honour to the school.

None of the old-fashioned observances are omitted here: Guy Faux is burned annually, with great ceremony; the bounds of the parish are beaten, and the luckless street-curs also, on the days dedicated to these time-honoured customs; holidays are numerous; cricket, shinty, and hockey, has each its respective season; the study of Latin and Greek is proportionate to the neglect of everything else, and the venerable institution of birch is not yet exploded.

Enough has been said to prove the antiquity and respectability of Sir Giles Monckton's school; it is now time to speak of those who taught and those who learned there in Gilbert Massenger's

time, some thirty years ago: and first of the Doctor himself.

VI.

Dr. Grahame was a bachelor—learned, solemn, severe; always attired clerically in black, and still adhering to shorts and shoe-buckles; usually his legs were encased in silk stockings, but in keen weather he appeared in worsted ones: he was then said to be in his "working dress." Many a heart quaked with apprehension when those ominously ribbed nether integuments were seen to move with stately precision down the Hall; they exercised an inscrutable influence on the wearer's patience, and were as a prophecy of evil to all short-coming boys. In person the master was tall, muscular, and erect; his countenance was harsh in feature, but occasionally benevolent in expression; his deeply set eye was stern and cold, his mouth compressed, his brow over-shadowing and thoughtful. He was not a man of genial disposition, but he bore the character of being inflexibly just in the exer-

cise of his authority; and was respected as an uncompromising, independent master, who would support and raise the reputation of the school at all hazards.

The Doctor resided in an old house near the church with two elderly women servants. His books and a toothless pointer, which had been his companion from puppyhood to extreme old age, were his only objects of attachment. Perhaps if he had shown more of the weaknesses of humanity he would have been more beloved; as it was, he was only feared.

The second master was almost as fine a scholar as his superior, but he was of a more popular character; on him rested the chief business of the school, and, being mild in the use of his power, he was a special favourite with the boys. There was yet a third master, who taught writing, arithmetic, and what little useful knowledge it was thought fit to impart to the pupils; but this gentleman was less highly considered than Dr. Grahame or Mr. Lane, for he had not devoted all his time to the study of Greek roots and Latin verse, which are the chief things to be attended to in education,

being, as is well known, universally applicable to all the purposes of life, and able to supply every deficiency of other information.

VII.

School was out. The Hall was abandoned to the evening shadows and young Noel Forester. It was just dusk enough to make remote corners mysteriously dim; the last slanting ray of sun had faded from the wall, and the rising wind had begun to moan amongst the churchyard elms.

Yet the popular prejudice against the place and hour seemed to weigh but little with the dilatory student; he looked desperately idle and uninterested as he leaned over his desk, his head supported between his hands, and his eyes fixed on a page of Latin verse which he was lazily endeavouring to transfer to his memory. Now and then a distant shout struck his ear, and each time he raised his head to listen; he fancied he knew his lesson, if only the Doctor would come and hear it then and there before he had leisure to forget it again.

An unusually long interval of silence tried his patience sorely; the twilight deepened, and still he was alone; he began to suspect that he had slipped the master's memory; presently he pushed the book aside, upset the form, and marched resolutely away to the porch to watch for his coming. There was no one in sight; the boys had crossed the river and were engaged in a hardly contested game of cricket in a field beyond it. Noel Forester did not care for cricket, but he liked Horace still less, and as he stood leaning against the doorway, prepared to disappear at the most distant view of the Doctor's hat, he cast about in his mind the possibility of emancipating himself from a routine of study that was daily becoming more irksome and distasteful. The result of his cogitations was a sigh, and the recollection that he was helpless and should have to go on with it, although convinced that it was time and money thrown away. Meditating thus he took from his pocket a strong clasp knife, and began recklessly to carve his name on the sacred panels of the door,

"NOEL FORESTER"

He gazed for a minute at the uncouth letters, and then began cutting away at his family motto,

"SEMPER EADEM."

Noel had just completed the final letter when a hand was laid heavily on his shoulder; he started and turned round. There stood the Doctor, his eyes staring, his brows knit; speechless with indignation, and pointing at his pupil's handiwork. Forester was a brave boy, but he did not quite like that look on his master's face: it betokened the worst form of his wrath; instead, however, of trying to deprecate the anger about to burst upon him, he merely stepped back a pace or two, and was silent.

"Semper eadem!" exclaimed the doctor at length; "semper eadem! Would no less conspicuous place serve you, sir, to put it on record that you are always the same? always indolent, thoughtless, and a disgrace to the school?"

The lad's cheek flushed hotly; he raised his eyes to the master's threatening countenance as if about to speak, but, biting his lip, he repressed

himself. The Doctor hurled forth a few more stinging sentences, and then bade Forester follow him into the Hall and repeat his lesson. Mechanically he obeyed, but his treacherous memory retained not a single line, and as he gave the book out of his hand he seemed to be struck dumb. With fascinated eye he watched the colour deepening on the master's face, but his lips never moved. After a pause of sufficient length to allow Noel to recover himself, Doctor Grahame shut the book and threw it down. "Sir, hold out your hand!" he shouted in a terrible voice.

Forester hesitated for an instant; the next he thrust forth his palm, while his lip quivered irrepressibly. The master had brought in from the fields a hazel switch, which he now raised in act to strike, but his angry eye lit on the lad's countenance, and something he saw there arrested its fall; in a husky voice he bade Noel take up his book and begone. Without pausing to reflect on the Doctor's extraordinary forbearance, he snatched his cap from its peg and walked towards the door, his proud heart secretly chafing at the indignity which he had so narrowly escaped.

"Stop!" cried the master, just as he was going out.

Noel paused irresolute; his eye wandered uneasily to the impious carving which the Doctor had come forward to examine, and he groaned in spirit when he saw that it was so carefully and deeply cut that it would endure as long as the door itself.

"I hope, sir, you estimate duly the importance of your handiwork," said the Doctor, grimly. "That name and motto will be fresh and distinct a couple of centuries hence; mind how you use them, that there be no dishonour in a memory that it has pleased you to make so conspicuous: you have taken a high place, see that you hold it fast."

There was a half contemptuous pity in Doctor Grahame's eyes as he scanned Noel's countenance, which hurt the lad far more than the threatened blow; he would have liked to defend himself from the scornful estimate the master was making of his capabilities, had he dared: something of his purpose was discernible in his crimson cheek and kindling eye.

"Well, sir! you may speak," said the Doctor;

"you wish to tell me what great things you have plotted, and which, opportunity offering, you will one day perform. Speak!—I am no tyrant; I am rather curious to hear what mighty aspirations are seething in a brain which has not room for half a score lines of Horace."

The impetuous words rushed from Noel's lips fast enough now: "I hate Horace," he exclaimed; "I am no scholar, and never shall be! What is the good of my slaving at Latin and Greek? They will be of no use to me."

The Doctor gasped with astonishment: that he should have lived to hear the alpha and omega of his existence declared to be of no use by a boy whom he had taught for nearly a dozen years!

"Pray what may be the natural bent of your genius?" he asked, when the first shock of surprise was over. Forester blushed, but said nothing: the grave, scornful scrutiny of the master's eyes chilled him. "You have enthusiasm, which is the primary element of success," he went on coldly; "but there are other things besides, my lad, which you have not. You want stability—you want a habit of stern application,

without which you will do nothing worthy: without which you will make miserable wreck of all you undertake. You desire to rise in the world?"

Forester nodded affirmatively.

"Is it anywhere recorded that a man obtained eminence by merely wishing for it?"

"No."

"Or by fancying it already in his possession?"

"No."

"Then why do you begin with the part of the driveller? Take my word for it, every hour wasted in wishing and dreaming, throws you back months—years it may be. You have something to do—do it with all your might; but never, as you would clutch success, stand idle dreaming. Time and opportunity may be on the wing while you sleep."

The Doctor waved his arm towards the door, and taking this gesture for dismissal, Forester put on his cap and walked away across the playground. The master watched him as he went, and then, previously to locking the door of the Hall, he turned to take another look at the inscription on the panel.

"I ought to have flogged him—certainly I ought to have flogged him," he murmured to himself as he turned away; "but then the lad has just his mother's eyes, and looks as she used to do when he is hurt. What an old fool I am!"

VIII.

Under the porch of the Grammar-school, on the following morning, was collected a group of wonder-stricken boys, who were contemplating the inscription on the panel. It still wanted a quarter to nine; none of the masters had arrived, but the day-scholars came hurrying across the playground by twos and threes, and as each new arrival appeared in the rear of the crowd, he was pushed forward to stare and marvel at the audacious record. Presently the youngsters began to discuss what penalty would fall on Noel Forester; opinions varied, but all were unanimous in declaring that he would be sure to "catch it." Expulsion, flogging, impositions of fabulous lengths were

denounced against the culprit; who, for the time being, was invested with the importance which attaches to a person over whom hangs a great misfortune.

In the very height of the debate, one of the smallest boys shrilly exclaimed, "Here comes the Man of Iron! I wonder what *he* will say?"

The speaker was cuffed on the spot for presuming to apply a nickname to the head boy of the school, and slunk off whimpering; while Gilbert Massenger strode into the midst of the circle, which parted obsequiously to receive him, as courtiers do before a powerful yet dreaded minister.

Not being in an amiable mood, Gilbert misappreciated the withdrawal of the crowd to make way for him: he was tyrannical, but, like most tyrants, he despised those who feared him, and delighted in making them tremble; so he caught a lad, not much his inferior in size, and gave him a gratuitous shaking. "Am I a fiery dragon, after a long fast, ready to eat up little boys without grace before meat, do you think?" cried he, grimly.

A sycophantic chorus of laughter greeted this sally, whilst half-a-dozen hands pointed to the defaced panel. Gilbert forgot his wrath as soon as his eye lit on the inscription: for a minute he paused, gazing in mute astonishment; then stepped forward, and passed his hand over the deeply-cut letters. "*He* dared to do that! Noel Forester dared to set his name there!" said he, in a deep indignant tone. "*I* once thought of carving mine on the side-post, but I let it alone; the Doctor would have raved so."

"It would hardly be safe to carry your intention into effect even now," said a voice close behind him. Turning round, he saw the Doctor, who had come up unperceived, and entered the Hall without further remark. Massenger, abashed only for a moment, followed, with the other boys at his heels.

Contrary to expectation, although Forester came in late, no allusion was made to the name on the panel, no punishment was inflicted, or apparently thought of. Some of the disaffected whispered "Favouritism!" "Great shame!" and so forth;

but when it was found that Massenger did not encourage this expression of opinion, it gradually subsided; and when, after school, the Doctor and Forester walked away down the High-street together, the boys contented themselves with wondering what such a conjunction portended.

IX.

Gilbert Massenger, the Man of Iron, as his schoolmates called him, had now been at Ashton Grammar-school for nearly seven years. He had a strong, comprehensive head, an overbearing temper, and extraordinary physical power; these three qualifications had, by the time he was sixteen, raised him to the position of head boy of the first class. He was not, however, a favourite with either his masters or companions; the surly independence of his manners irritated the former, while his domineering spirit kept the latter in subservience. Noel Forester alone, quietly but resolutely, refused his yoke, and from time to

time challenged his supremacy; there was, in consequence, a keen though unavowed animosity and rivalry between the two. Forester was of a popular character: gay, good-humoured, and generous; and for this very popularity Gilbert despised even more than he disliked him. Blunt and straightforward himself, he loathed every shade of falsity in others; it was not in his nature to condescend to those small courtesies by which his rival purchased favour: he had no ready smile for a master's threadbare wit, no pleasant flatteries to boys whose fathers were men of rank and consideration in the town. Forester had all these; and, perhaps, they were not the least of his advantages, for they kept him right with everybody; and whenever any of their disputes came to open arbitration, Gilbert was sure to be put in the wrong: to his intense but impotent wrath. Noel was too slight and delicate to afford a creditable conquest, were they to fight; he was too indifferent to be mortified by Gilbert's superior scholarship, and altogether too gentlemanlike to be made the butt of coarse jests or ill-natured raillery: more-

over, he was of a higher social class, and had a tone of mind which never could assimilate itself with that of the Man of Iron.

Forester possessed also remarkable personal beauty, whilst Gilbert was tall, broad, and muscular; the countenance of the former was fair and open, almost to the verge of effeminacy; the features of the latter were strong, his brow knotted, his hair black, harsh, and untrainable: everything about him, indeed, seemed rough-hewn, and apparently incapable of refinement. Again: Forester, being the only son of a wealthy country gentleman, had an abundant supply of pocket-money, which he squandered with a lavish hand; whereas Miss Massenger kept her nephew on the most limited scale of expenditure consistent with decency: many a bitter mortification had he been forced to undergo in consequence; many a covert sneer at his worn jacket and mended collars had he intercepted in their passage from his rival to other lads.

It is not to be denied that these annoyances counted with him for far more than they were

worth; he remembered them from day to day, they made his cheeks tingle at the moment, and fired his mind with a vexation all the more acute that he himself knew it to be for a cause too trivial to name. That a time of reckoning between him and his rival *would* come he never doubted; in the mean while he brooded over his real and imaginary wrongs, "nursing his wrath to keep it warm:" taking also some consolation from the reflection that he could at any given moment lick Forester with one hand; and that, favourite and fine fellow though he was, he could not construe decently, and knew no more of mathematics than a poker, having been stranded on the Pons Asinorum at least three years before, and halting there still, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts that had been made to get him off.

X.

The day of reckoning *did* come; but earlier and very differently from what Gilbert anticipated.

He had followed the Doctor and Forester down

the High-street with a burning sense of jealous anger in his heart, at noon, when they left the school together; in the evening, he made one of a party of lads who went some way up the river beyond the town to a secluded nook, where they were in the habit of resorting to bathe.

Here the stream was much deeper, its bed sloping suddenly, so that its even course was not broken or interrupted by the great stones which, higher up, filled it with little whirlpools and foamy eddies. The banks were fringed with alders and willows, the turfy fields on either side starred with wild-flowers; there was no wind and no sun, but the evening air was sultry with fragrant heat: the dark water looked cool and inviting under the shade of overhanging trees, and very soon all the boys, except Massenger, were luxuriating in its calm depths.

Foremost in every enjoyment was Forester; and Gilbert, as he lay idly at length on the grass, could scarcely help envying his joyous spirit. Moody and solitary himself, no one seemed to miss him, while the air rang with approving shouts of his

rival's name. At first he thought he would go out of hearing; but indolence prevailed, and he continued to lie where he was, watching the gorgeous sunset clouds with a vague impression of how beautiful they were—how much more beautiful than anything on the earth, to which habitually his thoughts were attracted and enchained.

He recalled to mind the time when he had looked up to the sky as the visible abode of the great and terrible God, whose threats, as interpreted by his gloomy aunt, had made him tremble. It was an awful puzzle to him then, and it was an awful puzzle to him still; but having outgrown the easily abashed days of childhood, his soul revolted against the system of pains and penalties into which Gertrude Massenger had perverted God's everlasting law. For many a year he remembered how he had dreaded to be left alone in the parlour with the heavy, black bound-book, whence those hard judgments were culled; he remembered hating it in his heart—hating it for the crimson stories of old Jewish days that it contained; hating it with a shuddering consciousness

that his feelings were known and recorded against him by the spirit of retribution that had inspired those awful writings.

Now he avoided it as much as possible; he heard passages read out of it at church and at school without taking much heed: in overcoming the old fear, he had lost all respect for it. Its histories had become familiar to him before he could discern more than their visible outline; their spiritual sense he never saw: only judgment untempered by mercy; only men weak and sinful, and God stern and unforgiving; nothing to love, nothing to trust; a world full of temptations, sorrows and sufferings, abutting on the dark waters of death; over which hung a mystery of terror.

"Unjust, hopeless," he had sometimes thought: "cruelly unjust, miserably hopeless!"

Thus brooding, his strong sense rebelled; his conscience lost its keen edge, and the limits of right and wrong became as cloudy to his vision as God, and heaven and the Bible. Often, now, he was tempted to think these things "a cunningly devised fable," wrought by skilful men of old

for the easier government of a particular people, equally prone to revolt and superstition: he felt, by its influence on himself, how powerful a check it must have been to live under the shadow of a law so stringent in all its provisions.

When minds such as that of Gilbert Massenger think on these things at all, they think deeply, earnestly; but, alas! like him, often blindly. On occasions like the present, when some striking aspect of nature forced his thoughts out of the beaten track, they rose with a vague yearning towards the power whose infinite glory and strength he felt and acknowledged, but whose infinite love was hidden behind the thick veil which his aunt's teachings had drawn up between it and him. For a little while he would grope about in the dark, striving after a right view of spiritual things; but soon, weary of the profitless search, he forcibly drew his mind back to more tangible interests.

Meanwhile he observed to the letter all the decent ceremonials of religion; his natural gravity of disposition kept him out of youthful frivolities,

He hearkened patiently to his aunt's lengthy readings, and more lengthy admonitions, until Gertrude Massenger chafed her hands over her heart, inflated with spiritual pride, and thanked God that he was not as others were. This, perhaps, more than anything else, tended to the hardening of Gilbert's heart: he felt himself a hypocrite; but since this fine morality, this sedate sobriety, satisfied his teacher, might it not be all to which her lessons ever tended? He sneered sardonically as he answered this question to himself; and from that day forth he no longer feared the source whence they were drawn. He heard other lads mock at sacred things as even yet *he* dared not do; there was something contemptible in scoffing at what had so lately thrilled his every pulse with sickening dread, and he always turned away, refusing to listen. Once or twice he had sharply checked some younger schoolfellows, on whose lips an oath or an imprecation was growing habitual; thereupon he was nicknamed "Puritan;" but when it was found with what a strong and ready arm he resented this contumelious epithet, it was changed

for that of "Man of Iron," which he grimly allowed as an acknowledgment of power.

XI.

A gloomy inner life Gilbert Massenger's was: thoughts dark, bitter, and earthy, began to creep over his heart. The red sunset faded; it seemed as if heaven's golden gate were closed against him as his soul pressed towards it: as the sky gradually darkened a strange sickness seemed to fall upon him; a mist obscured his brain.

"What is there in life worth the pains of winning?" thought he: "would that it were ended at once, but for that shrouded hereafter! *Hereafter?* Perhaps even *that* is only a human coinage! How can we be certain that there is a heaven to win or a hell to avoid? They may be tales to frighten children with: but if——"

He paused upon that "if," and looked towards the river. Only Forester and another boy remained in the water; the rest were preparing to return to the town. Suddenly, whilst he watched, Forester

flung up his arms, uttered a shrill cry, and sank; the other lad, terrified, instantly swam to the shore; but Gilbert, stripping off only his jacket, was in a moment in the stream, and striking out to where his rival went down. Noel rose the first time several yards off, and before the other could seize him the water again closed darkly over his head. Calculating for the rate the water ran at, Gilbert, the second time, succeeded in grasping him by the hair as he came to the surface; and, keeping his head above water drew him to shore, but apparently dead.

Immediately the accident occurred, some of the boys ran to a house near for help; others stood looking on helplessly, and as Gilbert laid their comrade on the grass, they drew back as if affrighted.

"What's to be done?" asked Massenger. Nobody undertook to reply, so he once more lifted Noel in his arms, and prepared to carry him to the nearest dwelling; which happened to be the vicarage. As he approached the wicket-gate with his burthen, two lads issued therefrom, followed by the clergyman and a matronly lady, his wife; who was instant in all kind offices for the unfortunate boy.

Providentially, a surgeon from Ashton was at the moment at the vicarage; and after some very anxious hours, Noel Forester again opened his conscious eyes upon the world. In the interim, Doctor Grahame had been sent for, and the boys, except Massenger, had returned to their homes: he lingered about the passages of the house, a prey to the strangest and most contradictory sensations. Scalding tears brimmed his eyes, and overflowed as he looked on the ashen face of his envied rival; he would at the time have drained his heart of its life-blood to bring back the ruddy flush to Noel's cheek. Ah! this death, how awful is it when its aspect can wipe off so many old scores of wrong and irritation!

Gilbert could have shouted with joy when the doctor came out of the room saying, in a calm professional voice, "He'll do now: with common care he'll pull through."

The next words did not stir one pulse; yet they were spoken heartily. Seeing Massenger waiting outside the door, the doctor clapped him on the back, and said, "You saved his life—five minutes

more under water, and all the physicians in Christendom could not have helped him."

"It was a fine, manly act of yours, Massenger," added Dr. Grahame, shaking him energetically by the hand.

It was almost more than Gilbert could bear; and, escaping quietly from the house, he walked home alone in the moonlight by the river side, glad to shroud his emotions from every eye but the unsleeping one above.

The clock of the parish church struck two as he passed by a short cut across the grave-yard into the High-street. He traversed its whole length and the market-place without meeting a soul; but on entering Low-gate, where Miss Massenger's house was, he encountered Mittie, who, in a sorely disturbed state of mind, had just started out to seek him. She hustled him into the house, scolding vehemently, and denouncing the heaviest judgments against him for keeping respectable females out of their beds till such an unseemly hour of the morning.

Gilbert was too bewildered and excited to heed

Mittie's storm of invective, but his aunt's address brought him to himself. She sat rigid and pale in her high-backed chair, with the Bible open at her elbow, and her cat on her knee; her eyes gleamed with stern displeasure; every tone of her voice was sharp as an angry blow.

"Where have you been, Gilbert Massenger? Tell me without prevarication: I insist upon knowing," said she. "I little expected to find *you* backsliding. Listen to what Solomon says"—and, turning to the book, she prepared to read a passage already selected; for, as of old, she had accused and condemned him in her own heart already.

It was many a day since this tone of his aunt had ceased to daunt Gilbert, and now he interrupted her at once with the brief narration of the evening's event.

"It was impossible to leave him till I knew whether he would live or die," he ended by saying.

"Why impossible? What was he to you more than to the others, who, you say, returned home?"

"Nothing—I liked him less than any lad in the school."

"I do not understand you? He was an unfriend, yet you hung about the house where he was taken in as if he had been a brother."

"I hated him so before—if he had died I should have felt like a murderer," replied he. As he spoke a quick shiver ran through his frame, which did not pass unobserved.

"Have you been in the water? You have caught cold," said Miss Massenger hastily.

Gilbert had slurred over his own part in Forester's rescue: he did not like to speak of it even yet; but being pressed for an answer, he said, "I was lying on the bank when he went down, and as he is a slight fellow, I pulled him out. You know I would have done as much for the Doctor's old pointer."

Gertrude Massenger looked at him sharply out of her deep, lightless eyes. "I am glad you are not disposed to boast," said she. "You have done what it was your duty to do in succouring an enemy, but there is no room for self-glorification. Tell Mittie to come in to prayers."

The exercises were unusually prolonged that

night: it seemed to Gilbert as if they would never come to an end. He sat alternately burning and shivering; sharp pains ran through his joints; his head was confused and throbbing with fever. It was an inexpressible relief when at last he escaped to his chamber, and flung himself exhausted on the bed.

XII.

A few days after, when Noel Forester re-appeared in the playground as blithe and frolicsome as ever, Gilbert lay writhing in the severest tortures of rheumatic fever; brought on probably by remaining so many hours in his wet clothes. The knocker of Miss Massenger's door had no rest between twelve and two; boys came in deputations to inquire, and every noon Doctor Grahame himself appeared, and puzzled Mittie by the multiplicity of his questions; for nobody was admitted to see the patient. Gertrude Massenger mounted guard over him herself as nurse; she seemed to have conceived a rough tenderness for him, in his helpless suffering, that

was alien to her character, and a singular improvement to it. A hard battle for his life Gilbert had: on some days it seemed as if death would get the victory, on others as if his constitution would win. The fever ran high; his delirious fits were frequent and violent; his sufferings very great indeed. At times, when his senses were clear, but his frame exhausted by intense pain, he would lie watching Mittie or his aunt at work; and when there came a knock at the door he always asked who had come, but expressed no wish to see any of his schoolmates.

When told that Noel Forester had been with some fruit, sent for the purpose from his father's hothouse, and wished to come up, he refused, but asked how he had got over the effects of his accident. Being told that he had no trace of it left, but was quite well, he observed — "That's always his luck." Still he seemed gratified at the attentions he received; and, recollecting how unpopular he had been, he was also much surprised thereat. He would have been more astonished still if he could have heard the laudations bestowed on him in the Hall by the masters, and in the playground

by the boys. He was transformed from a dreaded tyrant into a hero. The poet of the school, Jasper Lowndes, wrote verses on him, which were copied and kept by everybody. Noel Forester did them into Latin, and sent it home, where his mother cried over it. Some one unknown carved his name on the panel of the school-door, above that of the boy whose life he had saved, with the date of the event; and the Doctor said not a word. An imaginative boy averred that the master himself was the culprit; but that seemed unlikely: no discovery, however, was made.

While his name was being thus raised to great honour in his absence, Gilbert struggled through the worst of his disorder, and emerged therefrom a gaunt, ghastly shadow of his former self; glad of Mittie's stout arm to lean on as he descended to the parlour, and completely bereft of the strength on which he had prided himself formerly.

The first day down-stairs was wearisome; he could do nothing himself, and the harsh tones of his aunt's voice in reading were quite insuffer-

able, in the irritated state of his nerves. The rain drove heavily against the windows. The street, never gay, was now empty: even the itinerant ballad-singers, who commonly made it the scene of their display (to Miss Massenger's great scandalization) were driven into their holes for shelter. Mittie had ceased her habitual chant, as she went about her work in the kitchen, in deference to Gilbert's feelings; puss lay asleep in a corner of the sofa; everything in the house seemed dead-alive, but the old clock on the stairs, which ticked as sonorously and told off the leaden hours with as loud a whirr! whirr! as usual.

Gilbert tried to compose himself to sleep in his aunt's arm-chair; but in vain: he never felt more painfully wakeful. Next he took to reading the titles on the backs of the few books which formed the whole of their library. "The Christian's Pattern," "The Whole Duty of Man," "Foxe's Book of the Martyrs," "The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to a better," "The Holy War," and a few others of a similar kind, constituted all Gertrude Massenger's literature. "More than enough

for her, who had the Bible," she was accustomed to say.

"I wish I had that volume of the Arabian Nights, Lowndes once lent me," murmured Gilbert, with an involuntary sigh.

"It is a very worldly book," said his aunt, in reply; "worldly and unprofitable, both temporally and eternally."

The lad returned to his seat, and dropped wearily into it; he was more impatient in weakness than he had been in pain. Miss Massenger admonished him briefly on the sin and uselessness of this, and exhorted him to be still under the chastening hand that lay upon him. Gilbert groaned; there was no escape from his aunt's tongue, no holiday from her perpetual schooling. Opposite to where he sat there hung, in a tarnished circular frame, a female portrait; the colours were bright and unfaded, the dress after the fashion of a hundred years ago; but the countenance was handsome, and the eyes so darkly melancholy, that their expression haunted the beholder long after it was seen. As a child, Gilbert

had shrunk from those glances, which followed him about the room, even into its remotest corners, with their baleful light. This terror had passed with others no better founded; but at this moment the shuddering repulsion came back upon him strongly.

"Who is that woman, aunt?" he asked, suddenly, pointing to the portrait.

"Your great-grandmother," replied Miss Massenger, without looking up. It was the only picture in the room, and possibly was indebted to gloomy associations for its position.

"She has a disagreeable countenance," remarked Gilbert.

"She was a bad woman, and the just judgment of her sins was visited upon her," said his aunt, harshly; "and on her descendants after her, from generation to generation," she added, after a pause.

Gilbert wished to know more, and pressed the subject. Miss Massenger continued, in her coldest, most pitiless voice, "She died mad—that beautiful wanton. Her crimes ripened the hereditary taint in her blood to raving insanity."

"Go on," said the lad, with breathless interest.

"The chastisement did not end with her: two of her children—her favourite children—died where she had died before them. Your grandfather escaped, and lived to old age, in the enjoyment of all his faculties; but—"

Gertrude Massenger lifted her eyes to her nephew's eager face, to see what ailed him, he breathed so heavily. "But what?" he demanded, almost fiercely.

"I was going to say that my brother Ralph,—your father, Gilbert,—was subject to restraint many months before his death."

Gilbert drew a long sigh, and sank back in his chair.

For some time not a word was spoken on either side: Miss Massenger sewed on at the coarse garments which she wore herself and distributed to the poor; her nephew, in a feverish silence, watched the big rain-drops trickling down the steamy glass.

Presently the former rose and began to pace the room, talking, as she did so, half aloud but

to herself. "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children to the third and fourth generation," she muttered: "there is no escape from beneath the curse; but, by leading a holy life, we may ward it off. God is just. I have given myself a sacrifice to him—an entire sacrifice: time, money, natural affections—everything; and he has accepted it. He will require of me nothing more, until he takes my soul. I am safe." She paused by one of the windows, and looked out for a few minutes at the leaden arch of the sky, then resumed her work and meditative silence.

In the dusk of the evening the same subject was renewed. Gilbert thirsted to know more, and his aunt satisfied him fully; the details only served to burn the first plain truth ineffaceably into his brain, and to deepen every shadow that had hitherto darkened round him.

"We are the last of the race," said Gertrude Massenger. "It was a sad day to me when you came into the world, for I had hoped that we were dying out. It is wrong to perpetuate this

awful curse, Gilbert. It is cruel, it is wicked to give such a burdened existence to sentient beings: it is miserable selfishness to hand down to innocent children such an inheritance of utter wretchedness!" Her dull eye kindled, and her cheek flushed as she spoke: it was a remembrance, perhaps, of a stifled hope of youth and love that brought back that faint reflex of past days into a face usually as cold and colourless as clay; she —stern, harsh, cold as she appeared—must have had childhood, girlhood, with some of their sunshine, and some of their hopes. Indeed, her last few words seemed as if drawn up with an effort from some long closed well of experience—with effort and pain. Gilbert never forgot them.

XIII.

The morrow rose brightly; the ancient Lowgate was full of sunshine and summer sweetness; for there were gardens behind its tall houses, rich in old-fashioned, strongly-perfumed flowers: lavender

and rosemary; musk and sweetbriar; wall-flower and clove gilly-flower; stocks, roses, and all manner of aromatic herbs, whose use has become obsolete, like many another venerable and respectable institution of our forefathers. Gilbert, on leaving his room, paused by the open stair-case window to look out and feel the soft breath of June upon his face; it was pleasant, refreshing; it put new vigour into his veins, new life into his heart.

Instead of entering the parlour where his aunt was, he passed through Mittie's domains into the garden, and sat down on a rude moss-grown seat, partially decayed and half-buried in creeping plants. It was noon, and presently he heard the clock of the High Church strike; that was the signal for the boys to leave the Hall, and he called to Mittie that if any one should come to ask for him, they were to be let in.

The old servant came out to look after him; "I'm glad to see you brisk up a bit: there's nothing like fresh air," she said, eyeing him curiously.

He was, indeed, a singular being to look at, with his hollow, colourless cheeks, sunken eyes, and heavy black hair falling over his brow; his clothes hung loosely on his wasted limbs, and his fleshless hands protruded like those of a skeleton from his jacket sleeves.

"Your school-mates will hardlings know you," observed Mittie, when her survey was completed; "there's nothing of you left: I could carry you as I did when you were a little bairn."

A knock at the street door called her away, and in a few moments she returned to say that Doctor Grahame had come, and was in the parlour with her mistress. Whilst Gilbert was crawling feebly towards the house, Miss Massenger and the master came out. The latter shook him heartily by the hand, congratulated him on his recovery, and said how glad he should be to see him in the Hall again. The rough old doctor seemed much touched by his appearance, and complimented him warmly on the brave action for which he had suffered so severely.

"It was nothing, sir," said Gilbert, confused at

this unusual style of address, and thinking the affair greatly over-rated; "it was nothing."

Miss Massenger stood by silent, her hands folded, her face grave and expressionless, while the two talked together.

"Lowndes sent you his verses, did he not?" asked the Doctor laughing.

Gilbert replied that he had read them the day before.

"There are some spirited lines amongst them," added the master: "very spirited and clever; but the lad has got the habit of chasing a single idea round and round, through a dozen stanzas, until it is worn as thin as a shadow. Forester's Latin version of the same does more credit to his heart than his head; he could not have done it under smaller provocation than his load of gratitude.

Gilbert could not forbear a smile; he knew what his rival's performance would be—a mass of blunders, for which the Doctor, in any other circumstances, would have caned a fourth-form boy.

While they were conversing thus there came a knock at Miss Massenger's door such as it had

not echoed to since old Andrew died; the sound of wheels heralded the approach, and drew Mittie from her culinary operations with more precipitation than ordinary.

"It is Mrs. Forester again: is she to be let in?" cried she from the kitchen door.

Miss Massenger glanced at her nephew. "It would be uncourteous to refuse now," she said.

Gilbert flushed, but nodded assent. He had not seen his school-fellow since the evening of the accident, and he wished the awkwardness of thanks was over: it bored him to be made so much of. After the lapse of a few minutes, Mittie re-appeared ceremoniously conducting a tall elegant lady and Noel Forester. The Doctor bowed profoundly; Miss Massenger stiffly. Mrs. Forester acknowledged their courtesy; but all her warmth of manner she reserved for poor, gaunt, nervous Gilbert, who was quite abashed in the presence of so much beauty. A few broken words were all she could utter as she held his hands in hers; but, looking up into her face, the lad saw that her eyes were suffused with tears. Her emotion communicated itself to

him, to Noel, and even to the Doctor, who turned aside and blew his nose sonorously, while Miss Massenger stood by as calm as a stone effigy.

"He is my only child," said Mrs. Forester, half apologetically to the stern looker-on; "it is out of my power to express my grateful sense of your son's conduct."

"My nephew, madam," interrupted Miss Massenger stiffly.

"*You* are not Gertrude?" asked the visitor slowly.

"Yes."

"It is many years since we met," returned Mrs. Forester, in her quiet reflective voice, as if she were trying to discern in the inanimate, passionless woman before her some very different person whom she remembered.

Those two women, so contrasted now, had been Ashton beauties five-and-twenty years before—rival beauties; and Gertrude Massenger the fairer—strange as it may seem: so much can an ever-present care do in wearing out the traits of feminine loveliness.

Perhaps *they* had forgotten, but Doctor Grahame had not, the last time they had met. It was in that very garden, on a quiet summer's evening. The master, then curate of the High Church, and Frances Grant's devoted admirer, had on that occasion put his fortune to the proof and had been rejected; he heard the two girls laughing about his disappointment ten minutes after, and had fled from the place writhing with anger and sorrow—the poor old Doctor! He recollected every circumstance, every word, distinctly. A week after, Frances Grant married Mr. Forester; and her confidante, for some cause never fully understood, had broken off her engagement with a worthy and clever man, and begun to lead the nun-like, self-sacrificing life which had thus changed her.

Mrs. Forester made a few attempts to speak of former times, but Miss Massenger maintained a chilling, passive silence, to prove how indifferent they had become to her—how completely she had laid aside earthly vanities, and how little satisfaction she had in recalling them. Meanwhile

Noel had fallen into conversation with Gilbert, and was rapidly insinuating himself into his regard.

"The holidays are only a fortnight off, and then I shall go home," said he cheerfully; "my mother has set her heart on having you over at Langhope, and such fun we shall have! My father intended to come to-day to ask you himself, but he was obliged to attend a justice-meeting—he's a capital old boy, is my father: no nonsense about him; you will just suit."

On mentioning this to Miss Massenger, great reluctance was shown in acceding to it, although such a change was likely to be beneficial to Gilbert's health: but the invitation was so strenuously seconded by Noel, who spoke to her in his warm-hearted, impulsive way, that she was obliged to yield. When all the visitors had taken their leave, she, however, spoke out her reasons for hesitating.

"They are a frivolous, worldly family," said she; "it is possible that in cherishing your body I may be exposing your soul to peril. The moral

contagion of such society is worse than that of the grossly vicious: Langhope Tower is a booth of Vanity Fair, full of seductions for the unwary. You will be flattered, Gilbert; you will be petted with luxuries: don't come back to me disgusted with hard fare and plain lodging, for I shall change nothing to please you—remember that."

"I am not eager to go," said Gilbert: "I dare say I shall feel mortifications enough to keep me tolerably humble."

"You are learning to sneer, nephew. I would rather see you take even trifles in earnest," returned his aunt: "you never see me sneer. But regarding the mortifications you speak of—what are they likely to arise from?"

Gilbert made no reply.

"Be straightforward in your manners, affect no finery, whatever you may see, and you cannot be made to look ridiculous," she added. "I have heard you say the lads laughed at your clothes sometimes; surely you have too much sense to heed that now: but if not, you shall have proper provision made to avoid such ill-bred folly—you

might meet with it at Langhope, so you shall not run the risk."

XIV.

"When I was young and had no sense
I bought a fiddle for eighteen-pence;
And all the tunes that I could play
Was 'Over the hills and far away!'"

So sang Mittie, in the kitchen, with the window open, while Gilbert lay on the old garden seat, reading the tattered copy of the "Arabian Nights" which he had asked Noel to borrow for him from Jasper Lowndes. Pleasant company that fine Haroun Alraschid was, in the drowsy summer afternoon—pleasanter could not have been. The bees went humming in and out of the flowers; the leaves kept up a continuous fluttering, and above all sounded Mittie's cheerful though monotonous lilt—her best song and her only one—keeping him in mind of what else he might have forgotten—that he was in no genii-haunted, Oriental garden, but in sober, matter-of-fact England.

Very limited indeed was Gilbert's acquaintance with the wholesome old nursery classics: once, when he first went to school, he received the loan of that delightful and refreshing work "Jack the Giant Killer;" but before he had time to get out of the first castle with his enchanting companion, Miss Massenger pounced down upon the book, and, in spite of his tearful entreaties, committed it to the flames. It took a long time to save up his penny a week pocket-money to replace it: indeed, it is possible that Jasper Lowndes, the lender thereof, took advantage of his ignorance to enhance the price; for certain it is that Gilbert never partook of hard-bake or alecampane during the whole three months, when he was paying over the debt by weekly instalments.

Even yet, the clever but prudent young genius extorted a high price for every book he lent: the "Arabian Nights"—what there was left of it—was let out for sixpence; by this thrifty principle, the owner had gathered a very respectable collection of story-books, which were occasionally read surreptitiously in hall, but more frequently

on the river bank or under the shady elms in the play-ground. Gilbert had never ventured to bring them home, after that painful sacrifice, until within the last few months; and even yet Gertrude Massenger lost no opportunity of delivering a tirade against such "rank poison." Much more healthy for his mind would it have been if she had allowed him food suitable for his mental digestion, instead of cramming him with "wise saws and modern instances," tough moral precepts, and dark sayings hard to be understood, which would have tried the stomach of a misanthrope.

Mittie, when he was a very little boy, had occasionally told him stories in the dark, sitting on the edge of his crib; but his aunt coming into the room suddenly, in the exciting crisis of one of these tales out of the old servant's finger-ends, surprised them both, and was very angry. It seemed as if ill-luck and she had entered into a conspiracy for the routing of all the child's little schemes of pleasure. Never had he known the exquisite luxury of having his own way, until sickness fell upon him: afterwards he came to regard that rheumatic

fever as the luckiest event that could have befallen him; for, once the reins of self-government in his nervous young grasp, they never were wrested out of it again.

XV.

The holidays came. Gilbert was at the breaking-up, and got prizes. Noel did not; but he felt no disappointment at his ill-success: he had made up his mind that he never should win one, let him try ever so hard, and therefore—perhaps wisely—spared himself the pains of working at all.

The two boys set off together to Langhope Tower, which was at a distance of six or seven miles from Ashton-le-Forde. Miss Massenger had primed her nephew with standard advice for the regulation of his conduct before he left her; but, I am bound to observe, that he had forgotten it all before he was half-way over Langhope Moss, and had imbibed so much of his comrade's gayer and pleasanter humour that there was every prospect of his visit being a time of enjoyment and not of penance.

Almost buried in woods was Langhope Tower, the country residence of Lionel Forester, M.P. for Ashton-le-Forde. Part of the edifice dated from the fifteenth century, having been the massy keep of Langhope Castle; which was destroyed, all but this hoary fragment, by Cromwell's troopers, during the civil wars. The rest of the house had been added subsequently by the Roundhead to whose share it fell when the royal loaves and fishes were distributed among the hard-featured saints; and who, veering round opportunely in the political breezes that agitated the British atmosphere during a few weeks preceding a certain twenty-ninth of May, had saved his head and his possessions, when equally respectable characters had found themselves in disastrous case as regards both.

This exceedingly worldly-wise individual, Ezekiel Skirle by name—a man of power, and famous at expounding—had evidently understood the art of making himself comfortable here below.

The keep was gloomy; the walls were nine feet thick, and the narrow slits therein gave scanty

admittance to daylight. Ezekiel had money: too close an inquiry into how it was obtained would be invidious; and he was not averse to spending it. By and by, there appeared a breach in the old tower, such as neither Lancastrian nor Parliamentary cannon had been able to make; then came cunning glaziers and carvers in stone; in due time the peaceful breach was filled with glass, stained of divers colours, and bearing the arms of the Skirles (who knows where Ezekiel found them?) in the central, upper compartment. Wrought tapestry from France concealed the stone walls, and soft carpets lay under Skirlean footsteps, where Plantagenets, Howards, and Percys, had thought themselves luxuriously accommodated with rushes from Langhope Moss.

Ezekiel had the countenance of a malignant, and the conscience of a chameleon. In Cromwell's days he fasted and prayed very loud out (in public), and, in the merry times that came after, he roystered at court and in country like the best-born of King Charles's minions. Langhope Tower was the head-quarters of fun and frolic; the owl

in the Skirlean coat-of-arms blinked and winked at the scenes that went on in the gaudy hall under his respectable beak: such a grave bird would doubtless have taken wing with screams of horror had he been less tightly fixed in the frame-work.

In some remote time there had been a Mistress Skirle; but she came not to Langhope with Ezekiel, and had probably never emerged from the obscurity of the shop on old London-bridge, where her husband had made velvet suits for Baby Charles, Steenie, and other court gallants. She had borne him three goodly sons, in whom Ezekiel had much pride; tall, handsome, riotous youths they were in his life-time, though subsequently they returned to the thrifty ways of their progenitors.

Ezekiel enjoyed his day, until it began to wane; then he took thought for his descendants. He planted, he builded; and, by saving and raising rents, he replenished his coffers. In due time he was removed from the scene of his labours to Langhope Church, where his effigy still reposes in dignified marble on a splendid tomb. The Skirle

who came after him followed in his footsteps, and greatly increased his substance; his veins seemed to be filled, not with blood only, but with an ingenious compound of iron, brass, and gold: like attracting like, he earned the reputation of being the hardest, the most encroaching, and the wealthiest landowner of his county; and was beloved accordingly. But a time of reverses came.

There was a son born to the Skirle family towards the end of the eighteenth century, who differed from all of the name who had preceded him at Langhope Tower. It is to be presumed that by this time the drop of trading blood was exhausted, and with it the prudence of the Skirles. This scion of old Ezekiel's stock, drank, gambled, raced, and did many other naughty things; finally, he was killed in a drunken brawl, and the Skirles were extinct: except on their monuments, and in a certain disreputable ghost, who haunted the cellar, and frequently left the beer-barrels running, to the horror and dismay of successive butlers.

Mr. Forester bought Langhope and the estate

for an "old song," as the saying is, and had done much for its improvement; residing there constantly, and keeping the place up in the approved style of an English country gentleman: he was as popular amongst his set as his son Noel was at Ashton Grammar-school.

Gilbert's first impressions were favourable; he liked the freedom of action and the means of enjoyment he found; there was less stiffness and ceremony than in his aunt's dreary parlour: everybody was permitted to select his own amusement and to follow it after his own fashion. The two boys generally spent the morning fishing, or wandering about in the woods; and it was surprising how much they found to say to each other, when it is considered what a gulf there was between them. It is true that Noel Forester yielded his opinions to his companion; but less from obsequiousness than from a sense of his stronger mind and character—a sense with which Gilbert never failed to impress all who came intimately into contact with him; and once this superiority tacitly acknowledged, their rivalry was at an end.

But in country sports, and even many boyish amusements, Gilbert was far behind his schoolfellow. Noel had a room fitted with all the appliances of a carpenter's shop: a turning-lathe, saws, augers — everything, in short; but he had no mechanical tastes to turn them to use. One wet afternoon he introduced Gilbert to this place, in the hope that it might prove interesting to him. It did so; the Man of Iron's first words on entering it were, "Forester, you are the richest fellow I know. I wish you saw my old tools: they have been in the family three generations at least."

Soon he was working at the lathe, turning a piece of hard box-wood, with his coat off and his whole heart in the labour, while Noel sat in the window-seat watching him.

"I say, Massenger, what are you going to be?" he asked, stretching himself wearily.

"I don't know," replied the other, without pausing in his work; "but I can tell you what I should like to be."

"Well, what?"

"An engineer: there are grand things to be done in that line."

Forester yawned, considered a few minutes, during which he looked scrutinizingly into his companion's face, and then with some earnestness asked, as if he had just made up his mind to a new idea, "Do you ever wish to be famous, Massenger?"

The other raised his face, flushed with exertion. "The great prizes have to be worked for: I don't expect them to drop into my hands ripened by mere wishing—do you?" was his answer.

"No; I suppose not:" reflectively. "My father intends me to go into Parliament some day."

"Then you have got an outline drawn out for you, which you can fill up according to taste."

"Massenger, do you know I feel as if you despised me just now: as if you were saying to yourself 'What a fool he is!'"

Gilbert reddened, for Noel's suspicion was not far wide of the truth; but he did not avow it as he would have done a few weeks ago. "I think you a very generous, fine-tempered fellow, Noel," cried

he warmly; and this was the truth: but at the same time he had little respect for the facile, indolent temperament of his popular schoolfellow.

"There is Jasper Lowndes; he intends to be at the top of the tree some day," observed Forester, mildly. He was not deceived by Gilbert's evasion, but not being apt to take offence at what hurt him, especially if his conscience told him there was a germ of truth in it, he turned the conversation.

"Yes, the heaven-born genius!" returned Gilbert, with an unmistakeable accent of contempt.

"And Langton: nobody can imagine what he is going to do for his country."

"Oh, the prince of snobs! He brags too much for me," exclaimed Gilbert, turning energetically at the lathe; "and he gives us more of his pedigree than needs at times, and of his good blood. *Good blood,* indeed! there is more milk than blood in his veins—asses' milk, every drop of it!"

The Langton thus criticised was notorious for shirking a fight whenever his glibness of tongue drew on him the displeasure of a comrade, and was extremely obnoxious to Gilbert on that account;

who hated a coward worse than a Jew hates the unclean beast.

There was but one stool with its full complement of legs in Noel's work-room, and on it Gilbert rested, when he had turned a rather corpulent ruler of short length, and thrown himself into a great heat. His companion began to rail at the weather for confining them within doors, but he, who never murmured at what could not be helped, applied himself to the examination of some dust-covered books on mechanics, with drawings of bridges, tunnels, and other things, to him more interesting than the finest piece of art. While he was occupied thus, Mr. Forester came in, and seeing how his young guest was employed, he entered into conversation with him, and drew out a clear exposition of his tastes and inclinations as regarded his future profession.

"There is a gentleman in Liverpool, a civil engineer, a friend of mine, and one who will be glad to oblige me," said Mr. Forester; "if you decide to go into that line I will introduce you to him: you could not learn under a better master or a kinder man."

Gilbert expressed his thanks, but he felt more than he said: such a prospect elated him beyond measure. His aunt had never yet made known to him her views on the subject, and, perhaps, had never thought of his future.

"I wonder what I should have done if I had been born to work," observed Noel, when his father had left them alone again; "I don't think I should have taken to it kindly at all—do you?"

"Perhaps not," said Gilbert, who had returned to the lathe; "but I can tell you, Forester, if you are to live at Langhope, enter Parliament, give dinners, and hunt foxes, and I go to Liverpool, I would not change places with you—no, not if I have to work myself gray before I earn a roof of my own."

"I believe you. I don't quite understand, though, how you have kept so hard at Homer, Virgil, and Horace, when they can't help you an inch to what you prefer."

"Because I don't like to be beaten at anything. I could scarcely sleep at nights when I was put into the first class, till I got to be second in it.

Jasper Lowndes was a hard match for me, but I never rested until I had taken him down too. I can't help it: something always seems to be urging me to get on. I could not be hired to lie yawning on that window seat, when there was a lathe and wood, or even an old saw, within reach."

"It almost tires me to look at you. But if you have not tools that will work or books to read, what do you do then?"

"Sometimes I think: think on all sorts of unpleasant things, until I am dazed. I verily believe that it is in such idle moods as those that men plot great crimes—treason, murder, and the like; for the devil comes whispering bad, hard, cruel suggestions, and try as I will I cannot get rid of them till I come across work to be done."

Noel looked puzzled, and asked no more questions; but thought in his own mind that Gilbert Massenger was certainly one of the queerest, most incomprehensible lads he had ever seen.

"When I was quite a little fellow, my aunt used to punish me by locking me up in what we

called the dark garret," Gilbert went on. "There was only a skylight, and I used to sit under it feeling a perfect demon of spite and wrath. There was nothing I could do but stare at the clouds; not even a mouse-hole or a spider to watch: Mittie was so careful of dust even there. I got to hate idleness then. I spent whole days in that place alone, with nothing to do but count my fingers and remember dreadful Bible stories. I wonder I am not an idiot."

Noel began to whistle; then checking himself suddenly, observed, "I fancy you would have been a different sort of fellow if you had had my mother—she is just the best mother there ever was; it comes natural to her to love everybody, and so everybody loves her."

Gilbert stopped in his work and listened reflectively.

"Yes," Noel went on, "I never heard her say a hard word either to or of any one; and you should see her when people are ill: she has a way with them nobody else has, and she never loses patience, let them be ever so trying."

"I cannot remember my mother," said Gilbert, and he returned to the lathe.

They were silent after that, but presently there came a knock at the door, and Mrs. Forester's voice asked, "Is my boy here?"

"Yes, mother;" and Noel sprang to the door and opened it.

It was pleasant to see the perfect love and confidence between the mother and son; Gilbert felt it in one of the finer chords of his nature, which had been rarely sounded by human touch; yet it gave him pain, and a vague yearning for a love never to be his, stirred passionately for a few moments in his heart.

The two left the room together, Noel with his arm thrown round his mother's neck, and for the space of half an hour or more, Gilbert was alone. During that interval he thought with repulsion on the cold, loveless home to which he was to return on the morrow; thought of his persecuted, saddened childhood, and of his gloomy youth. It is scarce to be wondered at that these reflections made him feel hardly towards his aunt,

and charge her, perhaps unjustly, with a personal aversion to himself. He could not remember the time when she had ever caressed him, ever even given him a good-night kiss: she chose to convert her own life into one long mortification and penance, and he had suffered with her, against his inclination. Poor lad! he could have loved her if she would have let him.

XVI.

Gertrude Massenger was sitting down to tea when her nephew returned home. "Well, and so you have got back again," said she coldly.

"Yes," was Gilbert's brief reply, and he took his place at the table. The meal passed in silence; Mittie removed the tea-things, and Miss Massenger brought out her cumbrous work-basket.

"What have you been doing at Langhope? You are not very communicative," said she.

Gilbert gave a sketch of his amusements.

"You were not eager to return, I daresay?"

remarked his aunt, interrogatively. He could not say he was, so he held his peace, and presently began to read one of Forester's books which he had lent him.

"Please to close that volume, and listen to something I have to say to you," said Miss Massenger. Gilbert obeyed. "I had a call from Dr. Grahame, yesterday, and we had some talk about you," she went on. "I cannot tell what possesses him to interfere in what is certainly no business of his; but to come to the point, — he thinks it is time your studies should be directed to some particular end. I do not know what led him to suppose they were not so, for I have always understood that the course pursued at the grammar-school was the best preparation for what is to follow at the university. It is many years since I made up my mind as to what I should do with you."

Gilbert's heart throbbed vehemently. This was the tone she had always taken, as if he were to be disposed of like a piece of furniture. He was no longer willing to submit to this self-negation,

especially where the whole of his future life was concerned; he silently, therefore, prepared for a struggle between his own will and that which had, hitherto, ruled him unquestioned.

"I destined you for the ministry, from the very hour I received you into my care, and so I told Dr. Grahame," said Miss Massenger: "I suppose you have nothing to say against it?" This question was a mere form: there was nothing she expected less than opposition.

Gilbert paused a minute to collect himself; but a cold dew broke out on his forehead, as he answered, "Aunt, I cannot agree to your plan: I am not fit for it."

There was a dead silence for the space of nearly five minutes: the lad could hear his heart beating like a hammer in his breast. Miss Massenger's countenance never changed; she went steadily on with the work which she had not discontinued, and having finished it, put it again into the basket. "Gilbert, you are disobedient and unthankful," she said, quietly. "I give you a fortnight to reflect on the matter: if at the end of that time

you will not submit to my will, I throw you off altogether,—you may sink or swim by your own endeavours;" and thus speaking, she went out.

Not a word of angry recrimination was exchanged: no persuasion on the one side, or argument on the other. And the fortnight came to an end.

XVII.

"Then I am to consider that you refuse finally to yield to my authority?"

"Yes: every principle you have, whether rightly or wrongly, driven into me, protests against the systematic hypocrisy to which you would condemn me."

"That is enough. You hate religion, you hate the Bible, you hate God's service."

"You have stood as interpreter betwixt me and them," was the reply; "perhaps you have made that darkness which might have been light."

"So be it, then:—my conscience acquits me

of wrong towards you at any time. We cannot continue to live under the same roof on the terms you would establish, therefore you must go. You are young and strong, and will be able to earn your bread, probably."

"I would rather break stones on the high road than do what you ask."

"Break stones, then: it is indifferent to me what you do when you leave me. You have made fine friends lately; perhaps they will help you."

"I want no one's charity."

"Independent. Well, it is nearly night; you can stay here until morning, and in the mean time, I will put together what belongs to you rightfully. Your father had nothing to leave you; your grandfather put all under my hand, to do with as I would; and I should prefer endowing a hospital with it to giving it to be wasted by an ungrateful child. I have said my say."

Now while Miss Massenger spoke in this strain, she had a lurking thought that in thus driving Gilbert to extremity she should conquer him; but

she miscalculated grossly: she totally misunderstood the character she had to deal with. The lad was hardened, repelled: he saw that his thraldom must end now, or be endured so long as his aunt lived; and with one vigorous throe he shook it off. He was not daunted by being cast out on the world destitute; he had too much confidence in his own youth and strength. He had begun to crave after liberty, and the manner of attaining to it was of small import: he, therefore, left Miss Massenger's presence after he had heard his sentence, with a heart no whit heavier than usual.

When he was gone his aunt sat awhile reflecting; then she made into a parcel some little trifles that had been his mother's, a few poor trinkets, old coins, and so forth.

Mittie came in whilst she was thus occupied,—"So you are turning the lad out of house and home at last," said the privileged servant, wrathfully. "I can tell you what, Gertrude Massenger, your heart is as hard as the nether mill-stone. Nobody could or would live with you but me,

who knew you when you were a Christian woman, like other folks. Why should that poor fellow be driven about by your whims? I guess you've forgotten the bonnie mother that gave her fatherless lad to you with such a charge. I guess you've forgotten your promise to keep him as if he were your own."

"I have forgotten nothing, Mittie; and I wonder how you dare speak to me in such a way."

"I dare anything for the bairn I took and weaned from his poor mother! I have spoken to you before, when you were a wilful lass, and I'm not to be daunted from speaking to you now you're a wilful woman; and I tell you plainly, that all Ashton will cry shame on you for what you are doing now. How can you preach charity to other people, who have not your light, when you turn your own nephew out to starve for anything you may know?"

"Keep your own place, Mittie: no one has a right to interfere with me in my duty."

The old servant did not yield her ground yet: she begged her mistress, by every solemn conside-

ration she could adjure, to recall her threat; she reminded her of instances in which she had before wronged the lad; but all to no purpose: indeed, while Mittie pleaded with her thus earnestly, she was thinking within herself that by that hour on the morrow Gilbert would probably be all penitence and submission. After exhausting herself between tears and scolding, Mittie withdrew, and her mistress passed the rest of the evening reading books of devotion; hardening herself in what she thought her duty, and comforting herself against every event, by the excessive spiritual pride which suffered her to see no evil in herself and no good in others.

XVIII.

When Gilbert Massenger left his aunt in the parlour and went to his own room, it was not to think of what had passed, or to fear what was to come, but to act. He collected a few of his most necessary articles of clothing, and stowed them into

a small travelling-bag; he donned his coarsest suit of clothes, and put into his pocket a volume of Juvenal to beguile the way—the uncertain way by which he was to enter on a new life. His preparations were then ended: money he had little or none. He sat down by the window to wait for darkness.

By and by his aunt came to the door, saying that she had brought the articles of which she had spoken; Gilbert took them at her hand, and as she was turning away said, "Won't you bid me good night, aunt?" She feigned not to hear, and left him standing there looking after her, whilst she inwardly congratulated herself on what she mistook for the beginning of repentance. The lad turned back into the room sore and bitter; yet salt tears rose in his eyes as he watched the twilight fading, and thought of the dark days he had spent in that gloomy house: there was a certain pain in parting from it; a pain keenly felt, but scarcely understood, it was made up of so many and such conflicting feelings.

In the dusk, after her fruitless interview with her mistress, Mittie had been up to him, and had

given him some rough kind of comfort, but had chiefly recommended submission; he now heard her in the kitchen below, chanting that queer song about the fiddle purchased before she had cut her wisdom-teeth, which she used as an accompaniment to whatever work she had in hand. To be sure she cried at intervals; but Gilbert could not know that, and thought it rather hard of her to be merry whilst he was in such pain: it made him long to get out of the house to breathe the free air of heaven and prove his youth and strength again; for while waiting thus he felt paralyzed, life and limb. Then he heard her called in to prayers in the parlour, and as it was near ten he went down stairs and, unheard, into the garden, whence he passed by a door in the wall into a back street that ran parallel with Low-gate. He was not missed until the morning, and in answer to every inquiry that was made of Miss Massenger subsequently respecting his whereabouts, she always replied, "I cannot tell: he stole out of my house like a thief in the night."

For the first hundred yards Gilbert's limbs

shook like those of one in an ague-fit; but drawing a long breath and shouldering his stout stick with the bag slung upon it, he stepped briskly out and entered the market-place. The shops were all closed, and though still early in the night, the streets were almost deserted. Coming to the church, the clock struck ten.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed since he left his aunt's house, yet already it seemed fallen back years into the past. He went across the grave-yard and paused a little while by the ostentatious monument that covered the vault where mouldered the ashes of his grandfather, his father, and his mother. He read the inscription by the moon-light, which shone full on the white stone; they rested there, it said, in the hope of a joyful resurrection. Something that was almost a prayer rose in his heart as he walked on and entered the play-ground; a few steps more brought him under the school-porch. He took out his knife and added another date to that already on the panel.

While standing there he heard a heavy step approaching on the gravel-path, and drawing back into

the dark shadow of the cloisters, he saw the Doctor pass within a few yards of him. The worthy old man was reciting to himself some sonorous Greek verses as he returned from his late walk; he stopped near the gate, looked up to the cloudless heaven, and raised his hat as if in mute homage to the Deity. Gilbert was touched; this devotion, so secret, so spontaneous, could not be a plausible sham, a solemn cheat: it did the lad good to behold it; and when his honest old master had passed through the gates into the High-street, he came out of his concealment, crossed the river at the stepping-stones, and took his way through the fields, intending to strike into the high-road some miles beyond the town.

There was no pursuit for him to fear, and he walked leisurely enough. During the night he passed Langhope Tower, which looked like a great gravestone heaved up against the sky; he scarce turned his head to notice it, but tramped sturdily on, his spirit rising the further his old bonds were left behind.

At dawn he reached a large village; the early

cock was giving his first hoarse crow, answered ostentatiously from distant farmsteads by other birds, eager to announce that they were waking as well as he. Amongst the dew on the road-side grass, the tiny flowers were lifting their cups to be drained by the honeyed sunbeams; the blossomed hedgerows were casting their morning hymn out on the taintless air of morning from the throats of a thousand warblers. The light crept grayly over some low-lying hills that bounded the prospect, then tinged the church spire, then broke suddenly with a flush of glory over the fields.

Gilbert sat down to rest on a rude bridge of stone which spanned a narrow, brawling beck; he had walked upwards of twenty miles—he was foot-sore and weary; he went down presently and laved his head and feet in the stream, and was refreshed; some little weakness still hung about him from his recent fever, and sitting down again on the bridge he fell fast asleep. On awaking, the sound of carts and men at work in the fields, told him that the day of labour had begun; an old man with a child was coming towards the village from

milking his cows in a field a little way up the road; the two came to a stand opposite Gilbert, and the former wished him good morning. "I guess you are seeking work?" said he.

"Yes;" and Gilbert moved down towards the village with him.

"Are you a carpenter or a mason?" asked the old man.

"Neither." Civility checked further questions, and as they were about to separate at the door of a very humble cottage, Gilbert said, seeing that in its window there were some articles for sale, such as are exposed in poor hucksters' shops, "Can you sell me a cake of bread here?"

"No; but I can give you one. Run in, Jane, and fetch one," said the man. The meal was improved by a draught of the new milk, and Gilbert's heart, as well as frame, was re-invigorated by the wholesome food, which health and hunger made more dainty and delicate than the dishes on a king's table are to a cloyed appetite.

"I have a lad of my own out on tramp after work now; he is a quarryman, but I haven't

heard of his getting employ," said the old man: "he willed to go north."

"I am going north, too," said Gilbert.

"You'll happen meet, then." The call of a female voice within the cottage stopped any further communications, and the lad went on his way, rejoicing at the kindliness and hospitality he had met with at his first start into the world. It is unknown how much good may be wrought by one simple act of Christian charity such as that poor cottager's.

XIX.

About a quarter of a mile from the village Gilbert overtook a party of haymakers going to their work. They were followed at a little distance by a farmer-like man, their master. To this person, on the spur of the moment, the lad addressed himself. "Will you give me a day's wage for a day's work?" said he. The other eyed his lithe, muscular figure for a second, and then

twirling a straw which he carried in his mouth, answered curtly, "Yes."

He followed the haymakers to a large field where the grass was all cut and spread out to dry; and certainly none of the practised labourers did a better day's work for his money. He ate his bread and cheese and drank his beer with the rest under a wide-spreading elm at noon, then toiled on till the sun set, and so earned his first shilling. He slept none the worse that night for that his bed was of fresh hay, and his curtain God's sky.

Not to trace Gilbert's wanderings too minutely, it will be enough to say, that on the evening of the fourth day from leaving Ashton, he came to a halt outside of the village of Deepdell, a primitive little nook in a moorland country of the north-west. It was Saturday, and his feet being blistered with his hard walking, he determined to rest that night and the following day, and to pursue his journey on the Monday. The lad had taken up his rest within the churchyard wall, near the school-house; while he sat there, eating of some coarse bread

which he had kept from a preceding meal, the sweet voices of some scores of children broke out suddenly into the "Dismissal." Gilbert was startled; a moment before the place was hushed and silent, as if no living creature but himself were near, and now this burst of song filled the air. He listened to the free, happy tones; and when, a few minutes after, the school-door opened and the children poured forth laughing, shouting, and playing tricks in the exuberance of youthful spirits let loose, he almost envied them their careless, easy lives.

But death, it seemed, sometimes snatched a lamb out of the little flock nestled in Deepdell; for while Gilbert was still hearkening in his mind to their song, the sexton came near to where he sat, with spade and mattock, to dig a child's grave. He entered into conversation with the old man, who informed him that the boy who was to be buried on the morrow had been evil-wished by an unfriend of its mother's, and had faded away under a blight; going out at last like the snuff of a candle. Then the communicative sexton, between the short spells

of work to which he stinted himself, narrated to Gilbert many of the local superstitions: it seemed, from his account, that the villagers still believed in the wise man of the neighbourhood, in the evil eye, in the visions in the church-porch on St. Mark's eve, and in the ghost of the suicide who had been buried under the yew-tree behind the church.

The parish had no "great house," and no squire; the rector was non-resident, and the poor gray-haired curate, on fifty pounds a year, occupied the dilapidated cottage which was dignified by the name of rectory, and did his duty in season and out of season: yet, improvement avoided the little secluded hamlet as an incorrigible spot, too hardened in its customs and prejudices to be capable of redemption.

Within a mile of it, however, there was the steady tramp of advancing civilization. A colony of iron-framed men were at work tunnelling for the railway, which was to cross that district between a great manufacturing town and a western port. Gilbert, as he sat talking with the sexton, saw a troop of these sturdy fellows go down to Deepdell, where they lodged. His mind grasped

instantly at the idea they suggested—Why should not he be one of them? His purse was all but empty, and want was at his back: the sexton clinched his purpose by observing that the overlooker of the railway works had been inquiring at the village for more hands, and that Gilbert was a likely lad for him.

"Where is he to be found?" asked he, promptly.

"Wait a bit till I have finished this, and I will show you the way," said the old man. "He lodges with Widow Foster."

The grave done, the sexton carried his tools into the bell-chamber of the church, and led the way down the town-street to a neat dwelling at the further end.

"I guess you will want to put up somewhere if you stay here, and I have a room to spare—a better there isn't in Deepdell;" said he as they walked along: for the sexton had an eye to business always. He pointed out his thatched cottage to the lad, and, at the same time, explained that he was parish-clerk and gardener, as well as grave-digger. They separated at the garden-gate of the

Widow Foster, and Gilbert went up the gravel walk, and knocked at the door.

"Come in!" cried a jovial voice: he entered, and found himself in the presence of a young man who was writing and smoking at the same time.

He looked up, took his cigar from his lips to say, "What's your business, my lad?" and then restored it to them again, and puffed vigorously to make up for the interruption.

"I am told you want hands; I want work."

Again the young man looked up, but this time more deliberately. "You are not full-grown," said he: "where did you work last?"

"Nowhere."

"Blunt, at all events. Do you know, my lad, I think your best plan would be to go back to your friends," significantly.

"I have none to go to."

The cigar was again consulted for a space of five minutes; apparently it did not much assist the smoker's reflections, for after that he laid it aside on his desk and spoke: "You are not up to the work: I am afraid you won't do."

"Why not?"

"You will want to be off by the week's end, even if you hold out so long as that."

"Try me."

"I don't care if I do. The men are blasting up at Gurley's Hollow now; you can join that set, and get a taste of the hardest work first."

Gilbert said "Very well," and was going out again, when the young man stopped him.

"You are going to work for us gratis, then? You don't care for wages," said he carelessly. The lad reddened and laughed. "You are new to the trade: I ask no questions; but if you don't like it, tell me and I'll let you off. In the mean time you'll get the same rate of pay as other fellows of your years: you cannot do the labour of a seasoned man."

He nodded, took up his cigar, and again bent over his desk. Gilbert then went out. Poor lad! he had betrayed himself at the very first, by omitting to touch his cap, and by speaking without provincial accent. The engineer and overlooker, for he was both, was a kind-hearted,

shrewd young man; he thought Gilbert was some idle rebel who had broken from school or home, brimming with visionary schemes of making a fortune, and that he would presently be disgusted with the way he had chosen, and would go back to his friends wiser and more manageable than he had left them. In this thought he determined to keep an eye himself upon the lad, and the same evening spoke to the best workman of the gang he was to join, directing him not to spare Gilbert where mere labour was concerned, but to keep him out of danger, and show him his business.

The sexton, Peter Stone, was hanging over his garden-gate on the watch for Gilbert, when he issued from the widow Foster's cottage. Half-a-dozen sentences settled their arrangements, and the poor tired boy found himself, for the first time since he quitted Ashton, under the shelter of a roof. He flung his travelling bag upon the floor, and himself into a high old cushioned chair that stood by the window of the small but exquisitely clean room of which he found himself the temporary owner. It was on the ground-floor, and had

a broad lattice-paned window, which now stood wide open and looked on a sloping piece of ground glorious with midsummer flowers. A small press, a pallet bed covered with coarse linen as white as bleaching could make it, a square deal table and three chairs were all the furniture it contained; if we except a paper fly-cage which depended from the ceiling, and the rude delf ornaments that decorated the mantel-shelf.

Besides the old man and Bessie, a widowed daughter of his, there were no other occupants of the cottage except Gilbert. The woman presently brought in for him tea and wholesome bread; he ate heartily, feeling content with what he had done: glad that he had escaped the want that had threatened him; glad that he had got work which could spare him degradation—for where is the degradation of honest labour?—glad, especially, that it was a sort of side-entrance to the profession which he thought most worthy of a strong man's energies. He was prepared to work hard and live hard; he had youth and courage, health and hope, enthusiasm and perseverance, ranged on his

side; an invincible battalion, as they then seemed, against poverty, care, and sorrow: who, at sixteen, fears to face the world with it, or doubts that he shall come in conqueror at last?

XX.

Gilbert was awakened in the morning by the sound of the church bells. He rose hastily, dressed himself, and went out into the sunny little garden, while Bessie got his breakfast ready; having eaten it, he sauntered up the village towards the church. His appearance excited some remark amongst the villagers assembling in the porch, for they had not yet grown accustomed to the invasion of foreigners, as they called all people not of Deepdell origin. He noticed the person whom he had seen the night before in conversation with an elderly clergyman and another gentleman who gesticulated very much; but not wishing to call observation to himself, he entered the church at once, and was directed to a seat by

his friend the sexton, then engaged in tolling the people in.

The building was dark and low, and anything but picturesque. The roof was open to the tiles, which were covered inside with gray moss; between some of the interstices the blue of heaven was visible, and in more places than one a spray of green ivy trailed through and clung to the huge beams which supported the roof. The walls had been whitewashed, together with a richly-carved Norman arch and an ancient font, by some sapient churchwardens who called the process "beautifying"; having affixed a notice to that effect on a board near the door-way.

While Gilbert was secretly wishing they had been beatified before they had thus distinguished themselves, the children from the school poured noisily into the gallery, and were admonished, by a rap on the head from a long stick, to be less boisterous; this discipline, continued at intervals through the service, formed a swift staccato accompaniment to the sobbing, feigned or real, of the young Deepdell force. Next came the sexton, looking quite different as clerk, to find the

places in the books on the reading-desk: Gilbert scarcely recognized Peter, he had put on such a prim, solemn air with his rusty black gown. Then followed the choir, consisting of five men, armed respectively with clarionet, flute, and fiddles. Immediately they entered their pew they began the morning hymn, one after the other, and so continued to the end. The clarionet took the precedence and kept it, although it often went astray and missed the tune altogether for a line or so: the man who played it blew with such good-will that his fat, shining face was like that of an adult cherub—if cherubs ever get beyond babyhood.

During the time that this discord was going on the tardy church-goers arrived, and the meek, good old curate entered the reading-desk. There was no want of devoutness in the manner of the people, and Gilbert observed that some of the plainest and most earnest echoed audibly any word that touched them home: the rude simplicity of their worship seemed of that whose incense rises to heaven.

The prayers over, a stranger entered the pulpit,

for a charity-sermon was to be preached; the popular superstition that a new man can touch the pockets of his audience better than their usual minister, obtained at Deepdell as well as in the world beyond it. The preacher gave an extemporary discourse, chiefly unintelligible, and all ungrammatical through excitement. A profoundly attentive body of hearers he had: Gilbert overheard two old women saying as they left the church, that he was a "rare, deep-learnt man"; so it appeared that another widely-received fiction, namely, that what is obscure must be wise, had penetrated to that remote little moorland hamlet.

The afternoon service was poorly attended: a few old people were there, and the village children; but the choir was absent. In the rectory-pew there was a fair-haired little girl of a pleasant countenance, the curate's grand-child; she had come from the school, marshalling the children into the church, and then entered her own pew with a demure little gravity and self-possession that bespoke a child accustomed already to depend upon herself. Gilbert could not help observing

her, and several times during the service he found his eyes and thoughts strayed to the sweet face opposite to him, in spite of Gertrude Massenger's long years of training and teaching.

Gilbert ended his day of rest by unfolding the contents of the parcel received from his aunt. He could guess whose had been the little gold worn trinkets; but they were voiceless to him and without associations, since he had never known the mother they had adorned. He put them carefully away, nevertheless.

XXI.

Gilbert's new life had its grievances both many and various. The men recognized him at once as belonging to another class; his ignorance of what he had to do, and how to do it, excited their coarse ridicule; and his resolute keeping aloof from their society raised their enmity. The first week passed over; he was paid with the rest, and did not choose to see Mr. Shaw's quizzical, questioning

glance when he went up to his desk. On the following Tuesday he appeared at Gurley's Hollow in a complete suit of barracan, such as was worn by the others. The overlooker put up his eyebrows when he saw it, and said to himself, "The lad means to stay, after all;" and he went down to the rectory to talk it over with the curate, Mr. Leigh.

The following evening, when Gilbert was returning to the village, the curate joined him, with a pleasant "good-day." "I have seen you in church, my boy, the two last Sundays," said he; "and it is evident to me that you are just now out of your place. You may make a friend of me, if by any folly you have got yourself into this false position" —he paused as if expecting Gilbert to say something; but the lad was silent. "I do not desire to force myself unbecomingly into your confidence; but you may stand in need of advice such as my office warrants me in giving: remember it is easier to sink into degradation than it is to retrieve a lost step."

"There is more degradation in many services that look higher than there is in my work," said

Gilbert doggedly; "indeed, I acknowledge no degradation in it. I am as honest a lad with a pick in my hand as a pen."

"That may be," returned the curate; "but you are shutting yourself out from the society to which you were born, and to which you have been educated: perhaps, too, for some freak which timely submission might obviate and make your friends overlook. You will find it difficult to make your way back to your natural class after you have adopted the ways and manners of this"—touching his jacket-sleeve.

A curious expression came over Gilbert's countenance. "To put a case, sir," said he respectfully but firmly—"If you had any conscientious scruples—let us say about the things you teach—and your choice lay between standing up before a set of poor people to utter to them sayings to yourself unintelligible or even false—things you disbelieve, or shrink from as too hard for human nature—if your alternative was to be such a debased hypocrite, or to be a day-labourer, which would you prefer?"

"My lad, if I had any such doubts, which I heartily thank God I have not, I would even beg my bread rather than be the miserable lie you describe: but is that your case?"

Gilbert nodded, and was silent; the curate also spoke no more for some minutes: they came to the church-yard gate.

"If I find my way occasionally to Peter Stone's, shall I be unwelcome?" said Mr. Leigh kindly.

"No, sir; heartily welcome," replied Gilbert; and they separated there.

On the following evening, about eight o'clock, the curate made his appearance in the sexton's garden; he stayed for a few minutes talking to Bessie, and then went into the house. "You see I am in haste to avail myself of your permission to visit you," said he, and laying down his hat and stick, he took the great chair which Gilbert resigned to him. "I cannot rest until I have heard more of you: the glimpse you suffered me to see of yourself has roused more than curiosity, believe me. Tell me all—make a friend of me!"

"I will, sir," said Gilbert, touched to the quick

by the kindness and earnestness of this good old man; "I will tell you all." And beginning from his childhood, as far back as he could remember, he gave him a history of his training, his doubts, troubles, sorrows, and fears; his school-life, his stay at Langhope, his quarrel with his aunt, and his departure from Ashton, with the cause thereof, and the subsequent events."

"Your aunt made a great mistake," said Mr. Leigh, when Gilbert had finished his story; "but her meaning was good. A little more patience on your part might have accommodated matters."

"It would have been of no use temporizing: our minds were both made up," returned Gilbert.

"Then you intend to fight your own battle as well as you may. Have you no ulterior object? Those men gathered round the alehouse-door to-night are not companions for you: do you intend patiently to let their condition become your own?"

"No."

"But as yet you do not see your way clearly—is it not so?"

"Yes, it is."

"I need scarcely represent to you, that the necessity of keeping to the strict habits in which you have been brought up is stronger now than ever. Your training has been harsh, and in some respects faulty; but it ought to be a shield to you against the coarse temptations amongst which you may be thrown. It is dangerous for a youth to be without friends, without natural protectors—especially it is dangerous for one like you, whose religious principles are unsettled."

"We will not talk about that now, sir, if you please," interrupted Gilbert, wincing. He dreaded the thought of having brought a schoolmaster into his confidence.

"Well, my lad, promise me that you will not forsake your place in church," said the curate; "good may come to you unawares. God's service is not a hard service; those make a vital mistake who in their teaching substitute fear for love. 'Human nature revolts against a threat.'"

The moon had risen when the worthy old clergyman left the cottage to return home; his kind heart was deeply interested for the youth

whom he had found in such peculiar circumstances, and this visit led to many more: also in his rounds through his scattered parish he occasionally returned by Gurley's Hollow, where Gilbert worked, and stopped to say a few words of encouragement to him. Invariably he found the lad whistling or singing to himself, and he could not but take it for a sign that his mind was healthy and free from morbid resentment at his wrongs.

Mr. Shaw had been made acquainted with some of Gilbert's difficulties, and though during the daytime he treated him with no more familiarity than the others under his superintendence, the evening often found them together, either in the widow Foster's parlour or Peter Stone's "one room." The overlooker had himself risen from the ranks, as it were, by penetration, industry, and sagacity. He was a man of talent, and soon discerned in Gilbert even higher qualities than his own; whereas the one could originate and the other only follow out plans already laid down by others. He lent the lad books, and gave him instruction in drawing; finding him an apt

pupil and amusing companion, he gave him much of his leisure, by which Gilbert failed not to profit, working always far into the night.

"It is a pity you cannot be with —— a few years!" cried Mr. Shaw, naming the greatest engineer of the day, one night when something that he had done excited his wonder.

"The premium is an impossible thing," said Gilbert, not without regret.

"I suppose so. Well, you are learning in a practical school, and will be none the worse for it; but it is a pity there should be so many stumbling-blocks in your way, isn't it?"

The true definition of genius being that it can do what none else can, we may suppose that its fire was what kept Gilbert's energies always alight. No despondency overtook him; none of those dark moments when time seems to move with sluggish tide and the heavily-freighted bark is stranded and still: he felt his liberty in every limb, his hope and strength in every pulse, all the richer and more exquisite from the curb that had so long restrained them.

"A fine fellow: a real, genuine, thorough-going fellow, with the elements of a great man in him!" Mr. Shaw said of him, and the curate was ready to second the opinion, with a mental reservation of compassion for circumstances unknown to the other.

XXII.

One Sunday afternoon, about two months after his arrival at Deepdell, as Gilbert was leaving the church, Peter Stone came after him in haste to say that Mr. Leigh desired to speak with him. He accordingly waited in the porch till the curate came out with his grand-daughter, and at his request accompanied him into the rectory garden. His anomalous position had never caused Gilbert any embarrassment, or he would have felt it peculiarly awkward now, when invited to sit down with the clergyman and Helen on the rustic seat which stood under the cottage verandah.

"I have paid you many visits: you will stay with me this evening, will you not?" said Mr. Leigh.

"Yes, sir, gladly," replied Gilbert, his swarthy cheek flushing with pleasure.

While they were talking together, Helen wandered off amongst her flowers, culling here and there one, as their beauty and fragrance tempted her, and having arranged a very tasteful posy, as she called it, she came and offered it to Gilbert, asking him if he were as fond of flowers as Mr. Shaw. The lad was somewhat embarrassed under the upward look of her ingenuous eyes, for his floral knowledge did not go much further than distinguishing between a cabbage and a cabbage-rose; he thanked her, however, and Mr. Leigh came to his assistance by diverting her attention to their Newfoundland dog, Bruin, which had just comfortably deposited himself in the centre of a bed of mignonette. Away flew Helen in haste to dislodge him; but Bruin knew when he was eligibly situated, and declined moving: indeed, he pretended to be asleep, and when her admonitions grew too noisy, he just opened one eye, winked at her lazily, and shut it up again. She tugged at his collar, she pulled his ears, she patted his nose, all

to no purpose: he was equally impervious to scold and caress.

"Do come and help me!" cried she at last, in despair of succeeding by her own efforts. Gilbert could not resist the appeal; he went whistling to where Helen stood; Bruin rose, shook himself, and came to snuff at his new acquaintance; then, having apparently satisfied his mind that there was nothing objectionable about him, he followed him back to the verandah, and amused his leisure with tearing to pieces the flowers so carefully gathered by Helen, and inadvertently dropped by Gilbert when he crossed the lawn. The child espied Bruin at his work of destruction when it was too late; but though she felt rather mortified to see her gift thus treated, she said nothing, and Gilbert never discovered his loss. By and by they went in to tea, and it was pleasant to watch the little womanly ways of the child, as she waited on her grandfather. She was not yet ten years old, and had a face which, if it possessed not regular beauty, showed at least beauty's greatest charm—an expression of warm tenderness and sweet temper.

Gilbert's only intimates among the weaker sex were his aunt and Mittie: Mrs. Forester had seemed only a vision to him, too fair and splendid for daily use; but Helen Leigh was of another mould: it was a new sensation to know her. If he did not acquit himself with as much ease as he ought to have done, it was that he was blushing and embarrassed in her presence. Though it seemed as if she had carried off the brightness of the little study when she went to bed at eight o'clock, Gilbert felt freer to move, and his tongue, which had been as if tied, was unloosed again. Helen, though he had been so quiet a guest, settled before she went to sleep that she liked him nearly as much as Mr. Shaw: only the posy—that was too bad!

Alone together, Mr. Leigh did not let the opportunity slip of again attempting to speak seriously to his young friend; he found him in better mood, and not averse to listen.

"Sir," said Gilbert, feelingly, "your daily life is your best argument; it will have more power with me than the finest sermon that was ever preached."

Indeed, as far as human powers, when purified by the love of Christ, can go, Mr. Leigh's went. His white head was honoured wherever he appeared; the blessings of those who were sick or in misery followed him: even the scoffer and profane hushed his coarse jest when the good man passed. He was poor, and lived in homely style, but there were some who knew that he had refused preferment that he might remain with his little flock in Deepdell; and he was loved in his honest poverty by old and young. His parish was wide, but with a stout stick for the support of his failing limbs, he would weekly go to its furthest limits; no weather was sufficient excuse, and many a wild autumnal day did Gilbert see him toil over the hills with his Bible under his arm, intent on visiting some very old people who lived at the mill beyond Gurley's Hollow. He had not entered the Church for a living, or because it is such a respectable profession, but because he loved the service of God and the care of his creatures; and, working in this spirit, his toil was blessed.

Mr. Leigh's talking and reasoning could not melt

the hardness of many years: Gilbert heard him with respect; many of his gloomy thoughts were dissipated by the good man's discourse; but it was only through much tribulation that he was to come at last to a knowledge of the truth. Thus far, life and its belongings were enough for him: he would not return to the spiritual bondage of his miserable childhood. Mr. Leigh saw that he had failed in producing present fruit; but the seed was sown, and though it might lie long in the frost-bound earth, there was hope that in the days when the storms should have gone over it, when the rains should have fallen, and the clouds that return after the rain should be hovering above, the germ would rise up through the softened soil, and become a shelter from the after-heat to him who might else have fainted for lack of it.

Every Sunday evening after this, found Gilbert in Mr. Leigh's study, instead of his solitary lodging. Sometimes Mr. Shaw was of the party, and then the conversation was more general. Gilbert's shyness with Helen wore off somewhat also; and he had just made the discovery that she was

sprightly as well as careful, and clever as well as kind, when the necessity of the works obliged all the staff of railway people to abandon Deepdell, and himself among the number. The change took him by surprise soon after Christmas, and was communicated to him by Mr. Shaw himself.

"What shall you do?" asked that gentleman of Gilbert.

"What *can* I do? I must work on," was the reply.

A few days after the overlooker came to him again.

"Where we are going next I shall want a clerk under me, Massenger," said he: "you shall have the place, if you like."

"If I like!" cried the poor lad in enthusiastic gratitude. "If I like! Oh, Mr. Shaw, you are a friend indeed."

"My lad, say no more about it; at your age I was no better off than you are now, and I vowed that the helping hands that were held out to me should not want an imitator if ever I met with one

in need. The thing is settled;" and Mr. Shaw began to smoke very vigorously.

The two left Deepdell together early one Monday morning. They had taken leave at the Rectory the evening before, but as they drove past the little garden-gate in the cold, gray dawn, the old curate came out to say a few more words to Gilbert, and to give him a little parcel. Helen was in the porch, and waved them a farewell: she would have come too, but she did not wish to let them see she was crying. Bruin performed a ponderous dance round the vehicle, accompanying it with a deep-mouthed bay; he ran after them a hundred yards or so, but returned at the call of his master, "Come back, Bru. Come back, good Bru!" All three, Helen, her grandfather, and the dog, watched them out of sight. It is impossible to say which regretted the change the most, those who went, or those who stayed behind.

On opening the parcel which he had received from Mr. Leigh, Gilbert found that it contained the good curate's little, worn pocket-Bible. It was full of notes, and many touching passages were

marked by dates on the margin. A long letter accompanied it, in which the writer said the book had been his companion from boyhood, but that, his time being nearly spent, he placed it in the hands of one who might find it, as he had done, a shield against temptation, a guide in difficulty, and a support in distress—if he would take the trouble to read it aright. Gilbert pondered over it for an hour: it could not be said that he read it, for the sense it conveyed through his eyes to his mind was vague and indistinct; with a weary sigh he closed it at last, and laid it away amongst his mother's trifling remembrances, with the letter under the cover. This was when he had got to his new lodgings in the place to which they had been moved. He felt as desolate that night as if he had lost all hope, instead of rejoicing in his widening prospects: but this was momentary: the morrow found him again all energy and life.

XXIII.

During the five years that followed his removal from Deepdell, Gilbert had many a sharp tussle

with fortune; often he was driven up into a corner; he underwent every extremity of poverty —of that worst poverty which seeks to appear decently before the world; still he fought on: now gaining a painful step, then falling back; sometimes almost fainting by the way; until at length he became thoroughly seasoned to resist and to endure. Had the struggle come at his outset, he might have sunk under it; now from each repulse he rallied vigorously: but never while he lived did he get the chill of that period of suffering out of his feelings.

It is needless to depict this time more closely: many a man's painful experience can parallel it, and to those who happily have not had to weather such a storm, its details would seem exaggerated and overdrawn. Throughout it all, however, Gilbert's persistence never abandoned him, nor his assured hope either. It is good to watch men of his stamp—men without the advantages of birth, fortune, or patronage; to see how they fight their "battle of life" in their rude, natural armour of talent and energy: especially it is good to see them come in conquerors, loaded

with the spoils of fortune and hard won honour. To say that a man has "risen from nothing" is right, honourable praise—higher praise cannot be. But not to all is the crown of victoy. Often we see one, in the prime of youth, whose steps have gone eagerly forward a little way on the charmed path of success, marked down by death; while there are thousands of hopeless, nerveless strugglers in the arena, who would gladly make God's truce with calamity, and lay down their arms at the grave-side.

It was thus with Shaw, Gilbert's first friend and helper; he came of a consumptive family, and his career ended about fifteen months after they left Deepdell. No matter that the world spoke well of him; that he had skill and talent; an honest heart and a sound brain; that there were many who loved him and depended upon him:—his day's work was ended.

Most of us can call to mind some friend who departed out of our sight at the beginning of our journey: when we were coming to the heat of the day we have been called upon to pause by a

grave; to leave there a companion smitten suddenly in the midst of youth and strength: beside it we wondered and wept. Yet presently we have girt up our remaining force and travelled on; mournful for a little while, but soon forgetting. Perhaps, when nearing the end of our journey and looking back, we may espy it, quiet and holy, in the green land of the Past, and wish—wearily wish—that we too had been eased of our burden, instead of trampling on through sloughs of trouble and disappointment until the night is at hand, and we still far from God's inn of Peace.

All along the way we have come there rise these mounds of warning; yet none speaks to us so forcibly as that made amongst the spring-flowers, while the dew of morning was still sparkling on every leaf. But we cannot stay to read its legend; we must press on: we are even so hurried to gain the great highway where the struggle goes ever forward, that we would trample over it rather than delay. It is well for those who stand awhile patiently in its shadow, and who, passing out again into the sunshine, carry away its lesson in their hearts—"One

event happeneth to all men:" it may check the grasping hand and greedy spirit when they are ready to sin, and remind them of that startling question—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

In losing Shaw, Gilbert lost his chief adviser; but not for that selfish motive alone did he regret him: at his hands he had received benefits, and experienced kindness; there had existed between them a sentiment of true friendship, and many a month passed before the keenness of regret was assuaged. But at length his own struggle became so exciting, that memory loosened its tenacious grasp on the one bright spot in the past, and the wheel of life rolled so ruggedly on his stony pathway, that in taking heed to himself the faithful friend was half forgotten. And thus the world goes round with all of us.

XXIV.

One afternoon, early in April, Gilbert once more found himself in sight of the curiously-shortened

spire of Ashton-le-Forde church. It was blustering weather; a high wind laden with thick showers of sleet drove in his face, but he stemmed it manfully. It was nearly seven years since he had left the place, a destitute, friendless lad—he returned to it again a destitute, friendless man. He was a young giant in height, and broad and muscular in proportion, but with little flesh; he possessed a savage, rude beauty, without one mellow line or delicate touch: a face of hewn granite, hard and impassible; strong in feature, stern in expression, yet not without a certain dignity. Whatever the future might hold in store for him, it was clear that Fortune's favours had hitherto been scant enough. His dress was of the coarsest material and homeliest fashion; his brown, rough hands attested, beyond a doubt, that hard labour was nothing strange to them.

But he was not coming back without an object. He brought with him a plan, which he had carefully matured by many a month of study, for the draining and bringing into cultivation of Langhope Moss; a large, wild track belonging in part to the

town of Ashton, and in part to Mr. Forester. He had common sense on his side, and was sanguine of success; for the advantages to be derived from his scheme were palpable. Not only would some hundreds of acres of waste land be reclaimed, but the canal which he proposed to cut through it would connect Ashton with a wealthy manufacturing district, and provide easy water-carriage for the quantities of wood which rotted uncut in the neighbouring plantations, on account of the cost of transport.

Gilbert entered the town by the bridge; he did not attempt to cross the ford, which would have taken him through the play-ground; but as he passed the school-gates a troop of boys rushed forth and scampered in various directions, impelled by stress of weather to get into port as fast as possible. He fancied that in some he recognized faces he had known, but could not be sure, they flashed by him in such haste. The Doctor also came out; ponderous and slow as usual—perhaps rather feeble—with a huge cotton umbrella over his head and his working dress on. Gilbert drew off the pavement to let the old man pass; who acknowledged the

courtesy by a stiff bend of his head, but did not look aside or notice his former pupil.

Neither courting nor yet dreading recognition, Gilbert crossed the market-place; passed through Low-gate, where his aunt's dwelling rose in gray, unchanged dignity, and thence to a house in the suburbs, where a widow named Russell, whose shop as a schoolboy he had frequented, let him have lodgings at a moderate rate. She inquired his name, to which he replied that it was Gilbert; glad that she had not recognized him, for he knew her to be one of the greatest gossips in Christendom. Priscilla Russell was, indeed, a complete parish register. She knew everybody's antecedents, connections, and personal history. Recondite scraps of scandal which people had thought dead and decomposed years ago, were resuscitated by her powerful tongue; and if there was a woman in the world capable of discovering the skeleton hidden in everybody's secret closet, she was that woman.

Shut up in her dull little parlour, Gilbert took out the drawing of his plan to examine that it had

received no injury, and having satisfied himself that it had not, he lay down in the wide cushioned window-seat, which was made to serve the airy purpose of a couch, to rest and decide how he should act to bring his scheme into consideration.

Whilst there he saw coming down the street, with cloak blown in every direction by the boisterous wind, a tall, angular, decisive figure that he well knew. It was Miss Gertrude Massenger on one of her missions of mercy, which she generally chose to perform in the most ineligible weather. She came striding on, unsheltered by umbrella, with her head erect and her face set: she stopped at a miserable house opposite Priscilla Russell's, and went in. Gilbert watched for her coming out again, which she did in about a quarter of an hour; he could not perceive that she was changed in anything—not even in voice, for she spoke out loud and clear, while standing on the threshold: her words were audible to her nephew where he sat, and also to Mrs. Priscilla, who was lighting a fire in the cold grate. "There's Miss Massenger out in this storm again," cried she, going hastily to the

window; "she don't leave her penance undone. That is a lady, Mr. Gilbert, who is reckoned odd because she goes about amongst the poor folks so much."

"Indeed," replied the young man coldly.

"Yes: she does a vast deal of good; nobody is too hardened for her; the more plague they give, the better she cares for them: they can't tire her out: she is not to be beaten. Yet as much as she does for them there is not one of them glad to see her cross their door-stone. She has a hard way with her; you may see it in her face. She don't read to them or give to them because she loves them, but because she has made it out to be her duty: it is for herself, not for them, and poor folks are sharp-sighted enough to see through it: oh, dear yes!"

Gilbert was not responsive, and Mrs. Priscilla withdrew. She had, however, left him ample food for reflection: he had never before heard how his aunt was regarded by those amongst whom she laboured; what he had heard did not so much surprise as it touched him. Her life was

wearing away in a course of hard toil, unrepaid by gratitude, uncheered by love. When the dusk fell, he determined to go and try to see her: all resentment for childish wrongs was forgotten, all bitterness done away.

The storm still raved without when Gilbert turned into the wet street, intent on his purpose. On arriving at the door he knocked softly. He knew that at that hour his aunt would be sitting over the fire with her Bible and her cat; she would lift her head to listen what was wanted: he recalled her peculiar attitude and gesture, as he stood facing the wind until Mittie came and opened the door.

The old servant did not delay; "What do you want at this time of night?" asked she sharply: time had apparently made her temper worse than formerly.

"I am Gilbert Massenger, Mittie: don't you remember me? How is my aunt?" said the young man.

Mittie uttered a peculiar cry, and clasped his hands in hers. "Oh, but I am glad you're come

back again!" sobbed she; "I've thought you must be dead, as we heard no tell of you."

"Almost grown out of knowledge, Mittie; though with many years of life in me yet, I hope. But come, ask my aunt to see me." He would have followed the old servant at once, but she bade him wait until she had told her mistress, for she had been ill lately, and any sudden excitement aggravated her painful disease. Mittie opened the parlour door and only half closed it, so that Gilbert could not avoid hearing every word that passed.

"Miss Gertrude, there's one wants to see you," he heard her say.

"Who is it?" asked his aunt's voice.

"It's Gilbert: it's your nephew."

"Gilbert! how does he look? what does he want?"

"He is well grown: shall I bid him come in?"

"No. I have nothing to say to him; he only comes to insult me, perhaps: he was always proud."

"Nay, missis, but see him," pleaded Mittie;

"hark to the wind! you won't turn him from your door in a storm like this."

But while the old servant was vainly trying to soften Gertrude Massenger's obdurate will, Gilbert had turned back into the rain-washed streets, and was on the way to his lodgings; perhaps more saddened than surprised at his aunt's rejection of his advances towards a reconciliation: he had scarcely hoped she would see him, but at least his own conscience was pacified by the attempt he had made. He could not humble himself further: indeed, there was no need that he should, and small likelihood that the results would have been different even if he had; for Gertrude Massenger's resentment was still as keen and fresh in her heart as if his offence had been of yesterday. She had brooded over it until it was become a chronic sore, eating into her spirit with aching virulence The sharp remedy of personal affliction had not come near her yet: she still stood firm and strong on her bare rock of spiritual pride, and thanked God daily that she was not as other sinners are—weak and pliable.

XXV.

On the morrow, Gilbert Massenger laid his darling plan before the mayor and other men in authority at Ashton-le-Forde. His practical energy struck even them, and he was permitted to explain it without interruption; but no spark of enlightenment dawned out on the respectably stolid countenances of the listeners.

The mayor at length sapiently observed that he did not see what they wanted with improvements; another gentleman frankly acknowledged that he could not understand it; a third gave it as his opinion, that as they had done without a canal up to the present time, and as Langhope Moss was no more pestilential than formerly, they had better remain as they were; a fourth (he appeared the most influential of the set) remarked that the plan had a republican tendency, which called forth a jolly laugh from a stout gentleman who was standing with his back to the fire, aloof from the table whereon Gibert had spread his plan. "There is a

levelling tendency in the present age that must be curbed," added the last speaker: "Sir, I hate a republican!"

Nobody took up the task of replying to the fiery old gentleman, who subsided slowly into a low growl, whilst the person who had excited his irascibility came forward to the table.

"Have you seen Forester?" asked he, glancing at Gilbert.

"Not yet."

"Then you may spare yourself the trouble," said the cross old individual; "he can do nothing without us, and I am sure we shall never consent to such an outlay of public money—no, no!" Gilbert looked round at the others; a bland expression of relief was overspreading their countenances: they were happy to hear a decision pronounced that saved any further trouble or consideration; he therefore proceeded to roll up his papers, to go.

"You don't know what you are throwing away," said the stout gentleman. "I would drain Langhope Moss to-morrow, if I were in your places;

but there is not enterprise enough in Ashton to build even a ferry-boat, so everybody goes round by the bridge."

"Ferry-boat would not pay," said the tart gentleman.

"Nothing pays—nothing ever will pay—while you are tortoises instead of men," was the reply. "You are safe people, I don't deny; but the age has left you twenty years behind. When do you intend to finish that spire?" indicating by a gesture the church, which was visible from one of the windows.

"There is no use in spires," said the other, waspishly. "You are a utility-before-beauty man, and yet you would waste nobody knows how much money in piling one stone on the top of another, to serve no earthly purpose but for idle folk to stare at. Shall not be done in *my* time."

Gilbert was now ready to depart; he took up his cap, bowed, and went out; the stout gentleman followed him.

"Where are you to be found, young man?" he asked. Gilbert gave him the information, and

added that he should leave the town on the morrow. The other nodded, and turned back into the room where he had left his friends; and the keenly disappointed young fellow went out into the street, asking himself what he should try next.

Disappointments were not by any means new to him: indeed, hitherto, he may be said to have had more than his fair share of them; but they had been met with a virile energy that took from them half their weight: no sign of weakness or yielding did his countenance testify now; yet his position seemed built in with difficulty. Arrived at his lodging, where no eye could witness his rage and mortification, he took his plan, which had cost him so much thought and labour, tore it into two pieces, and with a muttered curse on the idiotic stupidity of the men whose verdict had made it worthless, cast it into the grate, and crushed it down amongst the coals until nothing remained but a bit of blackened dust. With him everything failed, let him strive and struggle as he would: all his exertions, and they had been as unremitting as they were great, had done for him nothing more

than supply him with shelter, food, and clothing from day to day. Assuredly his indomitable spirit was needed to bear him up; his iron will to keep him steady at such seemingly hopeless work.

XXVI.

Gilbert kept his room that afternoon in vague expectation of a visit from the stout gentleman; but he did not allow this to interfere with his arrangements for departure early on the morrow. He had up Mrs. Priscilla and paid her; then packed his small possessions in the bag which had accompanied him in all his wanderings. While thus occupied, he heard the voice of his new acquaintance in the shop below, and presently the widow scudded up-stairs, followed by two gentlemen: the second was Dr. Grahame.

"This is the young man I spoke to you about, brother!" cried the former in that jovial voice of his which sounded as if it came up fresh from a warm heart; "the young prophet you Ashtonians reject."

"How do you do, sir? Eh!—What!—Bless my life—it is Gilbert Massenger!" cried the Doctor, in amaze, and stretching out his hand he wrung the bronzed one of his former pupil most warmly. "William, this lad was my head boy once; it is *his* name you read with another on the school-door: the lad I told you of last night. So you have come back, you prodigal son?"

"Yes, sir, but my stay must be short. My own people will none of me;" answered Gilbert, with a smile.

They all three sat down on chairs obsequiously placed by Mrs. Priscilla, who had witnessed this little scene; and who, but for a hint from her lodger, would have remained to see the end of it.

"Well, I am almost bewildered," said the stout gentleman, William Grahame by name; "I forget what I came for, almost. I am proud to know you, Gilbert Massenger: your story is not unknown to me. An exceedingly clever young fellow!"

The Doctor came to his brother's assistance, and began to inquire of his old pupil how he came into his present plight; for even the master,

absent and short-sighted as he was, could not but perceive that the world had not gone altogether well with him.

Gilbert gave him a brief sketch of his adventures, and towards the end was interrupted by a question from William Grahame—"The cause, the cause! Why did you leave your aunt's house at all? It seems an ill-advised movement."

"Not when you know all," replied Gilbert; and then he stated the point on which they had quarrelled.

"Strange, very strange!" murmured the Doctor's brother. "Gertrude Massenger was not of that character formerly—I ought to know her. She was a fine-tempered, generous girl; overstretched her conscientious scruples, perhaps, at the last; but there may be two opinions about even that. You say she was hard, rigid, what not, to you?"

"Ay, brother, hard enough!" exclaimed the master; "every drop of the milk of human kindness turned to gall in her heart years ago."

"You knew her long since, then?" asked Gilbert, surprised.

"Yes, my lad, yes; nobody better!" answered William Grahame; "and for her sake, no less than your own, I am ready to do you any kindness in my power."

"Come down and dine at my house, Massenger; it is nearly the hour, and we will talk about it at our ease—eh?" said the Doctor, kindly.

The young man glanced at his jacket-sleeve and hesitated. Both the brothers understood.

"Never mind the outside; there is sturdy, sound heart of oak within!" exclaimed William, gaily. "I should not hesitate to exchange my fine broadcloth for your fustian, if I might have your years and strength. Come along, Massenger, we will all be boys again to-night!"

The oddly assorted trio excited some remark as they crossed the market-place into the High-street. When about half-way down it, Gilbert recognized his aunt walking slowly towards them on the opposite side of the way. William Grahame was just directing his steps across the street, laughing cheerily and talking loud, as his custom was, with his head up and his ruddy countenance shining

with good humour, when she passed them. The Doctor raised his hat, bowing solemnly; she acknowledged it with stiffness, and her veil blowing aside at the moment, gave all three a glimpse of her thin, high features and colourless skin under a black bonnet of most antique shape. Gilbert doubted whether she had seen, or at least recognized him, as she gave no sign of it.

"That is one of your Ashton worthies, is it, brother?" asked William Grahame, who did not resist the temptation to turn his head to look after that rigid figure in the worn silk cloak and singular bonnet.

"Yes; it is Miss Gertrude Massenger."

The other uttered an exclamation under his breath, and quite a shade came over his face. They were now at the Doctor's door, and he remained standing on the step looking up the street where the object of his remark was still visible, moving leisurely along; when she was out of sight he entered the house, and followed his brother and Gilbert into the sitting-room.

"It seems impossible: I can scarcely credit

what you tell me," he exclaimed, dropping into a chair.

"You may believe me, William—that is all that is left of your false ladye-love," replied the Doctor.

"Don't speak of her in that way, brother: you never knew all."

"I only knew that you thought she behaved very ill to you, and that her fickleness, or whatever it was, exiled you for a score of years or more from a brother who could ill spare you."

The other drew a long, deep breath, and, wrenching his thoughts forcibly away from the painful memory of some long-past trouble, turned to Gilbert, who was somewhat mystified by the foregoing conversation between the brothers.

"You found our dignitaries very averse to improvement this morning," said he.

"Yes, decidedly."

"You must show the Doctor your plan, that he may see what stultified noodles the wise men of Ashton are."

Gilbert pointed to the fire with an expressive gesture.

"What! burnt already? You are more prompt than prudent in some of your measures, young man. Was he always as hot-headed, brother?"

"He gave me less opportunity of knowing him than I could have wished. Just when we had found out the stuff he was made of he decamped," said the Doctor.

"Well, now, Massenger, if it is not encroaching on your confidence, may I ask what is your next plan, since this has failed?" asked William Grahame.

"Fate has me at an advantage just now," answered Gilbert. "I have neither plan nor prospects to speak of. There is manual labour—I must turn to that again, I suppose. I shall neither beg nor borrow with these at my command," and he glanced at his strong, sunburnt hands.

"I like your answer. Bless me, there must be some niche unfilled where such young fellows as you are wanted. There are plenty of deaf-nuts in high places—cannot you oust one of them? It is not possible that a head like yours is to be con-

demned to perpetual obscurity. It is not in the nature of things—I won't believe it!"

"My hour has not come round to me yet; I am ready to snatch at it whenever it does," returned Gilbert with a quiet smile.

"Heigho! many a man for lack of being on the watch misses that tide 'which taken at the flood leads on to fortune,' and so it ebbs away from him for ever?" said William Grahame with a long-drawn sigh: then breaking forth into one of his jovial, heart-stirring laughs, he added, "There's the Doctor, there, who might have been a bishop if he had not been dreaming in Ashton after a fair face, instead of paying court to somebody's ugly daughter. I remember hearing him say he could not forgive a woman for being ugly: it was a capital sin in her. For all he was senior wrangler of his year, he admired a pretty face as well as the greatest booby of his college—better—eh, Tom?"

"You run on too fast, William; you were very vulnerable yourself, remember."

"Very true; so I was. Young fools both!"

They dined in the Doctor's study; no other sit-

ting-room in the house being kept in habitable condition, and this was a chaos of books. Books everywhere: double rows from floor to ceiling; under the window-seats; beneath and upon tables, in great disorderly piles, convenient for stumbling over, but nothing else; blocking up chairs, cumbering the mantel-shelf, gushing out of half-closed closet-doors—a Babel of Books, yet the worthy Doctor's Paradise. His brother William, who never read anything more solid than a novel, over the pathetic parts of which he cried like a school-girl, had many a jest at him for his Polyglot Parlour, as he called it.

They sat long over the meal, but still longer after it, when a little table was cleared of its burden and drawn to the fire with the sparkling decanters, fruit, filberts, and choice cigars; for William Grahame was an inveterate smoker, and the Doctor also indulged now and then. The talk did not flag; the younger brother gave some rapid sketches of his wanderings in foreign lands; he had led a strange, unsettled life for many years, but had, at last, he said, taken up his rest in a

small house near London, with the brightest little girl in Christendom for a housekeeper: she was his niece, and her name was Helen Leigh. Gilbert wondered if it was the Deepdell Helen, but did not ask. It came out, however, in the course of conversation.

"It was hardly fair, William, for you to take Helen all to yourself," said the Doctor reproachfully.

"Ah! Tom, you may thank me for a deliverance; you could have done nothing with her. She is the sweetest little methodical soul! She would have dusted your books and arranged your papers until Polyglot Parlour would not have looked like itself. You could not have been happy in such a state of things."

The Doctor glanced slowly round his beloved room, then looked up at the picture of a bewigged bishop over the chimney-piece. "There is no knowing what I could put up with for the sake of such company," said he; "but I dare say she made the wisest choice: you suit her the best, William."

"No, brother, no!" cried the other; "she delights in you; but I could not do without her, and she took pity on me: perhaps the cunning sprite knew I should not give her a divided allegiance; but, Tom, we will come down at Midsummer and stay weeks with you."

"Make the most of her, William; you cannot expect to keep her long," said the Doctor smiling. "You will come to me disconsolate some fine day to tell me there is an impracticable fellow wants Helen, and won't be pacified with anything else."

"Not at all: I won't hear of it! Did not she promise to stay with Uncle William always when I carried her away from Deepdell? Of course she did, and I warn everybody from poaching on my manor;" and the jovial old man exhaled an immense volley of smoke for the next ten minutes without speaking a word.

The Doctor began to talk to his young guest. "I often have Noel Forester here," said he. "One would fancy the lad is rather partial to my company. He has turned out a handsome fellow, and

if he would set himself steadily to work, I doubt not but he would do something worthy."

"I believe in what men *do*, not in what they might accomplish if they tried," interjected William. "I never give a man credit for having the power to do what he never does. Plausibility is very imposing, no doubt; but when I see one of whom people say, 'He has talent, he has genius, if he would use them right,' I think it is a sham, and not the real thing; for sound talent and true genius don't go with a laggard spirit—they are like a spur in the heel to keep a man advancing."

"Perhaps you are on the best side of that mooted question, brother. Seeing is believing," said the Doctor. "But Forester is a fine character still. There is a generosity and frankness about him which are exceedingly pleasant. I think him clever, too."

"Yes, yes; but not sterling. Where would he be if he had stood in friend Massenger's shoes half-a-dozen years ago? It is lucky for him that he is born to be a respectable man; to go into Parliament; to marry a pretty white-handed wife; to

cultivate a family, and perform the other stereotyped duties of a country gentleman. He will go to his grave full of years and county honours; but don't try to persuade me, brother, that he might, if he would, be 'a great man' in our sense of that term. No, no;" and William Grahame puffed away at his cigar again as if he had disposed of that question at once and for ever.

The Doctor seemed rather mortified: Noel Forester was a favourite of his. After a pause he again addressed Gilbert. "Where do you go to-morrow?" was his question.

The young man hesitated; William Grahame answered for him. "He is going up to town with me: I have some work for him to do. I intend to give him a start."

"Ah, brother, those speculations of yours!" cried the Doctor in a warning tone.

"Don't talk about speculations; they are certainties. The spirit of the age is with me," was the reply.

"You both have steady heads, but the wisest are sometimes led too far in advance, and don't-

find it out until their standing-ground is slipping from under them."

"Well, Tom, if I ruin myself, Helen and I will come and quarter ourselves on you for the rest of our days. You won't reject us if we sue *in forma pauperis*, will you?"

"God forbid that I should, William; but remember, the child depends on you."

They conversed some little time longer, and arranged how Gilbert and the younger Grahame should travel to London in company; after which the former rose to leave, for it was nearly an hour past midnight. The master accompanied his old pupil into the hall, and, on shaking hands with him at the door, thrust a small roll into his palm. Gilbert's first impulse was to reject it, but the worthy old man persisted, saying, "Take it, my lad: fortune has not used you well; you need it, and I do not. When better days come, pay it, with interest, to some poor, struggling fellow like yourself. There, go away; good night!" Remonstrance was impossible, for he was hustled off the step, and the door shut in his face.

XXVII.

William Grahame had a house at Norwood, and thither Gilbert Massenger repaired, according to invitation, one afternoon about ten days subsequent to his arrival in London. In the interim the excellent Doctor's gift had enabled him to take a respectable lodging, and to clothe his outer man in garments more suitable to his new position: for he had got occupation, and began to see daylight in his labyrinth of toil. Let nobody despise the advantages of dress; so greatly was poor Gilbert improved thereby, that Mr. Grahame, not having caught his name as announced by the servant, failed at the moment to recognize him. His first word, however, broke the spell, and shaking him warmly by the hand, he presented him to Helen Leigh. "I must claim the privilege of an old acquaintance," said Gilbert, substituting a cordial clasp of the hand for the conventional bow with which Helen was disposed

to receive him. She blushed sweetly, and submitted, but was evidently at fault as to whom he might be.

"You do not know me," added he, with a faint tinge of mortification in his voice.

"Oh, yes, I do: I recollect you now!" she cried, suddenly, offering him her hand again; "you are grandpapa's friend: how could I be so stupid as to forget." Mr. Grahame now called for explanation, which was soon accorded to him, and the three sat down the best friends possible.

"What the barber and tailor can do for a man!" was William Grahame's silent soliloquy. "What a glorious young fellow that is! Now if Helen is worth a chip, we may read the funeral service over her without delay. She is sure to fall in love with him, and I see it in his eye already that he cannot resist her."

The old bachelor was rather premature in his conclusions. Gilbert had indeed thought it a bright, happy face on which he looked down, but his heart was not of that susceptible, wax-like nature which takes off the impression of every

bewitching countenance on which the eyes happen to fall; when passion should write its characters on his strong soul, it would be deeply, as with the steely point of a graver—not lightly, as "in water," for the first ripple to efface.

Helen had some work in her hands at which she really sewed, without any pretence at all, while her uncle and his visitor talked together. Gilbert could not resist stealing a glance at her from time to time, until his eye had made out every detail of the eminently attractive picture. From a fresh-complexioned, frank-looking child, Helen had budded into a tall girl, slender and elastic in shape, with a quick, springy step, and light, graceful carriage. Her face was clear and open in expression, the brow large and white, the eyes beneath it pure and limpid as a stream in sunshine—faithful, trusting eyes they were, whose glance went straight to your heart from hers, as if they would mutely tell the loving truths that her pretty curved lips knew so well how to speak. It did Gilbert good to look at that quiet face—it rested and refreshed him, as dwelling on a calm

landscape might do to one who had been long tempest-tossed amidst winds and darkness.

He wished earnestly to know what had led to her transplantation from Deepdell to Norwood, and, an opportunity occurring, he asked.

"Poor grandpapa died three years ago, just when Uncle William came home from Norway," said she; "my mother was his youngest sister, and so Uncle Tom took me to Ashton first, and afterwards I came here."

"I should never have settled down without her, Massenger; I had become such an inveterate wanderer," interrupted Mr. Grahame: "she has clipped my wings effectually."

"I am not safe yet, uncle; how long have we been here?—six months, nearly. Mr. Massenger, we have moved five times in two years—he cannot be pronounced a complete cure yet; can he?" Gilbert replied that he thought not.

"I like this place very well," said William Grahame, with an air of satisfaction; "but Helen has nomade tastes too. You cannot deny—home-loving bird that you are—that you have often a

hankering after those breezy Yorkshire fells, and mossy hollows where the beck runs gurgling amongst stones. I have watched you, Helen, with your ear bent and hand suddenly arrested, listening to the pleasant old echoes. I have known what you were dreaming about, by the saddened smile that fluttered on your lips and the light sigh that wafted it away."

"I shall love Deepdell always," murmured Helen: "I was a very happy child."

"And a wild one—wild as the birds in the woods. What think you was my first introduction to my niece, Massenger? I am a famous pedestrian, you must know; I have tramped half over Europe on foot, and America too, and when I was a younger man I never rode where I could walk. About eight years ago, I made an excursion into the north-west, and turned out of my way twenty miles or so for the sake of seeing my sister's child. You know how the beck winds by Gurley's mill, through the hollow and the plantations, down to the village and by the rectory garden? Well, after I had passed the mill a little way, I saw a bit

of a child with its shoes and stockings off, its skirts kilted above its knees and its hair fluttering in a hundred golden rings, wading into the water after nobody could tell what; unless it expected to grow rich by gathering the diamond sparkles that hid amongst the ripples, and dived out of sight when the tiny hand was outstretched to seize them. I called out to ask if she was a fairy; 'No! I'm Helen Leigh; the fairies live down yonder,' said she, pointing to Gurley's Hollow; then out she came, when I told her I was Uncle William, and skipped along beside me all the way to the rectory. I made up my mind that very day that when Helen Leigh was to be disposed of, I would have her—and there she is."

"They came to make the railway, and away went the fairies!" cried Helen, smiling: "they could not be persuaded to stay within hearing of pick and hammer. Their rings were dug up, their trysting-trees cut down, and now a dozen trains go puffing through the hollow every day, and the country-people have almost forgotten all the legends that used to delight me."

"You believed them, Helen?" asked her uncle.

"Oh yes! I believed everything. I thought it was all true."

"You are wiser now, sprite."

Helen looked dubious.

"I *know* more," said she.

"What a logical little head!—drawing distinctions between knowledge and wisdom," exclaimed Uncle William.

Gilbert did not find it tedious listening to this affectionate, egotistical discourse; he watched the swift little fingers that handled their needle so deftly, pausing only for a moment's reflection, or for a quick, upward glance at Uncle William, which revealed a bright treasure of affection in a pure, warm heart.

A true, fervent, womanly nature is a healthy study for any one; but especially is it good for a man who has to lead a life by himself—who is environed with temptations on the right hand and on the left—whose struggle has been hard, and his experience narrow. There are coarse pleasures within his reach, if he will take them: feverish

excitements, soul-degrading indulgences; but who could go from the presence of perfect purity and perfect innocence, like Helen's, and fall into the slough of vulgar dissipation? The fortunate star of Gilbert's life was in the ascendant when it brought him into contact with such an exquisite nature. She became to him as the type of her sex: something holy, stainless—whose presence was to be respected—into which he might not go with any thought but such as an angel might read unblushing. Her influence was the stronger that he had not come into contact with the light and frivolous; and the time was not far off when she was to become the one woman in the world to him—the idea of all women sanctified by his love for her, and his intimacy with her goodness. But this was not yet.

Mr. Grahame's house stood within a small garden; a well-grown hedge—shrubbery it could scarce be called—of laurels, holly, and other evergreens, inside the iron palisades, enclosed it from the road, then white with summer dust. It was only a little spot, but Helen had done her best to

make it gay and fragrant; for her tastes were simple, and her garden her greatest enjoyment. Tea over, for William Grahame kept early hours at home, he proposed to smoke his evening cigar in the open air, and Helen slipped her hand through his arm to walk with him according to custom; Gilbert followed them out upon the narrow lawn, and for nearly an hour they paced it to and fro. They talked chiefly of distant countries that William Grahame had traversed in his wanderings; Helen liked to hear of them: it was a story that never tired her.

"I was about your age, Massenger, when the restless fit came over me," said he. "I had no particular tie to England, and there were many reasons why a change was desirable. If you are ill at ease in mind, gnawed by a pain that will not sleep, travel: keep moving; try to run away from it. I started without plan, and on foot; I had means to travel otherwise, but that was not the object. I followed the guidings of my own erratic mood, avoided beaten tracks, seeking variety in remote nooks unvulgarized by tourists.

I went north, south, east, west. I smoked the pipe of peace in American solitudes with grave Indian councils; traversed the pathless savannahs of the north, the wilder pampas of the south. I was wrecked on an island of the Pacific, and lived nearly two years amongst savages. I have been tiger-hunting in the jungles of Bengal, and an Easter devotee at Jerusalem. I have slept in the tent of a desert Arab, and in the sultry huts of Egyptian peasants. What I began under the urgency of necessity, I continued by habit. I tried to settle in England when I was about five-and-thirty; but it would not do: I had no friends, no occupation, no inducement to sit down and be still, and in three months I was off again. There is scarcely a spot of renown in Europe that I have not seen. Growing older, I became more gregarious, and followed the herd; I did the *grande tour* according to the guide-books, taking more time to it, of course, for nothing needed me—no one missed me, except, perhaps, poor brother Tom.

And so it went on, year after year, until age, with its fore-warners, gray hairs, began to creep over

me. I went into Norway to try and revive the old spirit, but it had sunk low amongst the embers, and declined to blaze up any more, even at the sights of that weird old land; then I came home, not unwilling to rest, if rest I could. Next Helen, here, lost her grandfather, and stood in need of a protector. There was Tom; but I thought we should suit better somehow: besides, had I not promised her to myself long before? And now she has me fast tied down—hand and foot, will and wish, eh, sprite?" As he spoke he passed a caressing hand over Helen's bright, waved hair. She looked up at him with a fond, trusting smile. "You will never escape again," said she; "your tether is shortened since I got hold of it."

"Yes; but I make the most of the little liberty she allows me, Massenger. I am exploring the wilds of this overgrown London, and in all my wanderings I have not met denser ignorance, grosser superstition, or more debased human nature, than here, in the very centre of civilization, in the midst of the finest people upon earth."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Tom says 'Indeed!' with the same unconvinced air; I speak according to my own observation."

The sun had now set some time, and the night dews were beginning to fall; William Grahame's cigar also was out; he and Helen, therefore, entered the house, and Gilbert took leave: not, however, without receiving an invite to come again very soon.

XXVIII.

Gilbert was not destined to take Fortune by a *coup-de-main*; he was to woo her slowly, warily, unwearyingly. At each step of his advance, some stumbling-stone of difficulty turned up in his path. Genius itself cannot at once supply defects of training, and this he was continually finding to his discomfiture. But he worked forward manfully, and being taken by the hand by a man in such esteem as William Grahame, he met a certain degree of encouragement. The small end of the wedge which was to force open for him the close-locked gates of worthy success was thus inserted; he had

henceforward but to push straight, strong, and constantly, to master the coveted jewel within—honourable renown: a legitimate object of ambition, surely.

He guided his life by the strictest rules of morality: he went astray after no wandering marsh-lights; no ascetic in remote mountain cell was ever more frugal than he. This was at first, perhaps, more matter of necessity than choice, for his reputation was not then high enough to enable him to command the full value of his work. It was incumbent on him to appear respectably, and therefore he was forced to economize in matters out of sight. He never ran into debt, for he was accustomed to say, and truly, that "ready money is a check on the imagination;" so he was spared the biting anxieties which are a mortal clog on men as aspiring but less prudent.

During this period his visits to Norwood were few and far between; he saw Mr. Grahame in town almost daily, but his own lodgings being in a distant quarter and his time of the utmost value, he rarely stole half a day for that long

walk. It was not that he was indifferent to the friends he had there—far from it; the only danger was that it might become too attractive. Whenever he did go, he invariably returned filled with a strange buoyant exhilaration of spirits, as if he had come to the dawn of a happy day, whose later hours had a mysterious haze of happiness over them, too bright to be lasting. Thence the past seemed only as the grim phantasmagoria of a dream; the present unreal; the future all golden mist. He would ponder wilfully over the picture in his mind whilst he traversed the City streets on his return from Norwood to his lodgings; but once shut up in his cell, he covered it resolutely from his sight, and pinned his thoughts down to the palpable and the real. After each visit, the effort became more difficult—sometimes even altogether abortive. Once he caught himself forging a dainty signature on the margin of an almost finished plan; he pished and pshawed over his folly, but did not quite amend his ways, and it was not the last sheet he spoiled in that way.

He took himself to task harshly. What right

had he to think of the sweets of life yet? What had a struggling, poor, prospectless young man to do with love? especially what presumption to imagine Helen Leigh could ever be the prize of such a grim Vulcan as himself! Delusion! infatuation! preposterous aërial engineering! He laughed bitterly at himself; called himself a dazzled fool, a bewitched simpleton.

Of course there were no results from this mood; the more he tried to put the tempting vision out of his sight the more obstinately it obtruded itself. At last he bent his neck to the yoke, and took the persistent stranger in. Love was at home in his heart at once, and though Hope paid only angels' visits, Love lived and gathered strength from the high-beating pulses amidst which he nestled: he did his host a good turn too, for he softened down the asperities of his character; gave some delicate touches to his disposition which it had hitherto grievously lacked, and even went so far as to temper the expression of his granite brow, and to unfreeze the lustre in his dark, stern eyes. A more genial mood came over Gilbert; the softer

passions, long dammed up, checked, hidden, broke their bounds suddenly, and expended their floods with lavish, spendthrift force, fertilizing the barren waste of his soul with rich and happy harvests of thought. He had wrought hitherto in darkness, fettered and fierce; he looked up now, and behold the dawn was come—light and liberty.

XXIX.

Helen Leigh was not faultless: it is a melancholy fact to acknowledge, but women very rarely are. She was quick-witted, and she had a warm, generous heart of her own; but now and then a certain malicious elf got possession of her ear, and prompted her to be extremely mischievous. She did not play off her freaks of humour on her Uncle William, but reserved them for the tormenting of poor vulnerable Gilbert, whose awkward but well-meaning attention appeared to her diverting in the very highest degree.

His chance with her, indeed, looked micro-

scopically small at first. Anybody who had started with a moderate stock of hope would in all probability have abandoned the suit in utter discouragement; but he, having nothing to lose, held his ground at a distance, and worshipped humbly and respectfully: happy in his devotion, as sincere devotees mostly are, though their divinities be freakish and wilful. The only blush of promise for him was that she did think of him, though it was quizzically; and that she appreciated while she laughed at him.

She was yet a child in matters of feeling; she had scarcely heard of the potent "pleasure-pain"; the fancy of her youth had gathered no glowing mist over its stainlessness: no hot, false fervour of imagination had anticipated the day of real love; heart, mind, and spirit were yet pure as unsunned snow.

One Saturday in October she was left quite alone all day; towards evening she grew weary: not with work, or thought, or exercise, but weary of doing nothing, and of having nothing to do. She was at an inquiring age—just sixteen—when

it is dangerous to be idle and solitary. She had been round the garden, whence the dew and the twilight had driven her in; she had looked into her uncle's sanctum, but he was absent and the fire was nearly out; thence she wandered back to the drawing-room; that was bright enough, but empty. Here, however, she sat down on the hearth-rug, her chin on her hand, and her eyes fixed dreamily on the fire; and here she stayed while the evening was closing in and the wind rising out of doors. She was in the very elysium of fancy when a cinder dropped from the bars and clinked upon the hearth; that common-place sound brought her back to the still room and a sense of vacancy. This was just the mood for temptation to assail her; her large eyes lifted themselves indolently and roved round the room; rested a second on the dark window, where a loose twig flapped noisily against the glass, then strayed to a picture, then back again to the window.

At this moment she recollected that her uncle had said he should bring Gilbert Massenger to Norwood to stay over the morrow; a provoking fit

seized her as this flashed into her mind. "Oh, would n't it be fun to tease him!" thought she, all the native Eve sparkling up into her eyes; "he looks so grave and solemn even when he hands the muffin that I am forced to look as demure as a quakeress. I won't to-night: he shan't scare me!"

This train of thinking suggested feminine vanities; and away she flew to her chamber to change her dress. It was a bright, innocent face she saw reflected in her glass, notwithstanding her naughty, elfish humour. She smoothed her hair, which was glossy and soft as a skein of fine silk, donned a light muslin dress, and all was done that could be done; a thing so young, pure, and daisy-like needed no decoration: the ornament of her own grace and light-heartedness was richer than gold and gems; the lustre of her fair, budding womanhood eclipsed all sheen of costly, silken apparel. Then she set herself to watch from the window for her uncle's return; presently she saw him and Gilbert coming down the road; a third person was with them whom she did not recognize; but without waiting for

a second glance she sped down stairs, and saw that tea was ready on the table and waiting for them.

William Grahame came in with his usual greeting: "All well, sprite?" seconded by an affectionate pinch of her blooming cheek, and then turned to bring to her notice an old acquaintance—Noel Forester. From their words Gilbert gathered that they were very friendly, and that it was a great mutual pleasure for them to meet; he flushed hotly as he advanced to shake hands, and further distinguished himself by nearly falling over a stool in his retreat to the further side of the room.

After tea Helen ensconced herself amongst the swelling crimson cushions of her favourite couch, and permitted Gilbert to seat himself near her. She had a peculiar sort of liking for him, after all, and this had enabled her to detect a restless, anxious expression in his eyes, that was not usual. Her womanly instinct prompted her to administer balm to this unknown pain—which also, a little, pained her; she forgot her naughty machinations at once, and became frank and cheering according to her nature.

It was three years since Noel Forester had first seen Helen Leigh at her uncle's house at Ashton; she had been a sort of pet of his: he had taken her to Langhope, and shown her the pleasant wood-walks about the quaint old town where she was staying. Her mourning was then recent, and she had clung to the fine, generous-tempered youth who patronized her, as to a genial friend. In the interval she had passed the limits of childhood without losing its impulsive feelings or forgetting its attachments. It was a real pleasure to her to see Noel again, and she told him so in a frank, glad tone that struck chill to Gilbert's heart.

Into whatever attitude Helen fell it was sure to be natural and graceful; some experience had made Noel Forester fastidious with regard to woman, but his artist-eye coveted her instantly: she was the incarnation of that ideal which had tantalized his imagination ever since he knew what beauty was. He "fell into captivity" immediately. Womanish wiles, borrowed airs, practised graces had never had power to charm him, though he had seemed to yield to their temptation; but this fair, wilderness-

cherished heath-spray subdued his impetuous soul instantly.

He began to talk to Helen in a light amusing strain that soon distanced poor Gilbert, who sat silently looking on with a dark and thwarted countenance. He felt that he showed to a disadvantage beside his gay and polished school-fellow, and a fierce pang of the old bitter, half-contemptuous rivalry flashed through his mind. Was he to cross him here, too?

With a stern effort at command over himself he at last entered into conversation with William Grahame, and tried to shut his ears to what they were saying; but his often broken questions and irrelevant answers were enough to betray him to the shrewd old bachelor. Noel had recently begun to cultivate the Muses, and had published a thin volume of poems, tender but weak; Gilbert knew this, and devoutly wished him on the top of Parnassus, or in any distant, comfortable locality. That Noel was seized with a fit of inspiration was visible: he waxed more and more brilliant from moment to moment, and Helen looked delightfully entertained.

To Gilbert his discourse sounded "flat, stale, and unprofitable;" tedious and tasteless beyond measure: he wondered how Helen could listen to him without weariness. Presently Noel asked her to sing; she complied, and ballad after ballad was trilled in the sweetest and airiest of voices; occasionally Noel chimed in with deep, mellow tones—the hoarsest croak of oldest raven would have been celestial harmony in comparison to Gilbert.

Once Helen turned round and asked, "Will *you* take a second, Mr. Massenger?"

He did not exactly understand her, and blundered out something about not caring for music; she and Noel laughed, and spoke low together for a few moments after that. Gilbert thought—burning with indignation all the time—that they were laughing at him: which was not the case.

Gilbert had not frittered away his heart in half a score of boyish fancies; when he consecrated to Helen its first passion, ardent, fresh, unworn, she was exalted to the throne of his spirit to be his darling, his sovereign mistress. And she was blind to his adoration: she allowed herself to be amused

and beguiled by a person chiefly attractive through his superficiality. Gilbert, loving her as he did, would not have grieved her for the world, and ignorant of feminine wiles, he had never conceived the idea of a woman trifling with the man she preferred. He assumed his case to be desperate, at once: Helen approved Noel Forester; she had met him with frank, beaming smiles; her eye, lifted to his, shone with a calm, pleasant light; she was never thus at her ease with him.

In his jealousy poor Gilbert was unjust; his whole vision was warped: he was also absurd, and he knew it; but the knowledge was not of a kind to bring ease. His affection, love, passion—what you will—lay mute in his heart: he had not put it into words. Helen did him no wrong; her cordial frankness to Noel Forester was the natural manner she had with every one who did not chill her into reserve: perfectly unaffected, ordinary circumstances did not embarrass or oppress her. He had put in no claim to her exclusive friendship; she observed his overcast brow, but did not connect his ill-humour with her own proceedings: it was

scarcely likely she should do so. She knew he *liked* her—instinct taught her that; but of the height, depth, and strength of his overmastering passion she had no inkling. Especially would it have been difficult for her to understand the nature of the love which was testified by Gilbert Massenger's being gloomy, abrupt, and stern; by his keeping at a distance from her, and by his answering her shortly when she spoke to him.

He had piqued her sufficiently by this mood to make her half resentful ere the evening was over. Hitherto her little tantalizing ways had seemed to spring from the lingering, elfish spirit of childhood: she liked to tease Gilbert because he blushed, was shy, proud, and not seldom awkward; and when she broke down the chilling reserve he cast over her, she was daring in measure to her previous dread. But now, however, her curiosity was awakened by his persistent coldness; she urged her woman's wit to discover the reason for it, and, that failing, she kept the puzzle in hand to disentangle at leisure; permitting the more sociable Noel to absorb her meanwhile.

Once Gilbert overheard her say that every stone, every moss about Langhope would always be dear to her; the words shot like a fiery dart through his vitals:—were they not "confirmation strong as holy writ" of her love for his rival. His head throbbed, his face burnt; to hide the emotion he could not stifle, he bent over a book, though without seeing a single line.

Helen came unperceived behind him, and looked over his shoulder. "Much good will it do you to look at my poor little sketches the wrong way up," whispered she in a voice too low for any one else to hear, and which thrilled along his every nerve like a subtle chord of music.

Noel Forester had passed round to the opposite side of the table by which Gilbert sat; when Helen spoke he looked up with a start, and their eyes met: Gilbert's, dark and troubled as a turbid pool with storm-clouds over it, betrayed his inward tumult of jealous passion; Noel's, kindled with the fervour of a new-born hope, shone clear and radiant. That momentary glance was a mutual revelation.

"*He* loves her!" thought Gilbert, "and for him to ask will be to have: he will win her."

"Poor fellow! he has not much chance, but it must not be I to cross his path," said Noel to himself; and with that resolution he turned to Mr. Grahame, who, finding himself somewhat neglected amongst the young people, had taken refuge behind his newspaper.

Helen drew up a chair, and sat down close at Gilbert's elbow.

"I will show them to you, and tell you all about them, if you will listen," said she good-humouredly; and drawing the little sketch-book towards her, she proceeded to turn over the leaves, bidding him say, now and then, if he recognized the scenes depicted. "That is the Hollow—you know it—there is the mill and the mill-stream;—there is not a prettier nook in England, is there?" said she. "Not that I have drawn it well, but my memory fills up the outline with all the various tints of moor and moss: I see the great water-wheel whirling round in the sunshine, and the showers of sparkling drops it scatters; and the

willows growing on the banks and gazing at their own graceful reflections in the shallow water. I see the gray old mill with its lichened walls; the hoariness of antiquity mossed into every stone—yes, and I hear the pleasant dash of the water over the dam, the low babble of the beck below, and the thrushes singing in the hedge-rows and mill-orchard. Now look here at Peter Stone's cottage, and there is the church and my dear old home—oh! shall I ever forget it!" Helen paused for a moment, and her voice sank rather lower as she went on. "Poor grandpapa was buried here under the old yew-tree near the gate. You remember it? He often stood to speak to the people there as they came up to the church. He used to talk of you after you were gone, and wonder what had become of you. He rather expected you would write to him, and was disappointed when you never did. It was only a few days before he died that he spoke to me of you, and said that people often met strangely after a long separation; he told me to remind you of his last counsels, if I ever saw you again—he did not say what they

were; but you have not forgotten? You liked grandpapa, I know."

Helen had a deliciously-toned voice; clear, yet soft, and capable of as fine shades of expression as her countenance; it seemed to caress poor Gilbert's ear, and to soothe his ill-humour magically. He listened without interruption, and his brow lightened visibly.

Helen turned another leaf and another. "Ashton school—you ought to recognize that, and the queer old church," said she; "Uncle Tom showed me your name and Mr. Forester's on the school-door, and afterwards Mr. Forester told me all about you—I was sure you were grandpapa's friend, from his description. Now, can you tell me what this is?"

Gilbert looked intently for a few seconds, but was baffled—the scene might have been anywhere in the three kingdoms, for it had not one strikingly distinctive feature; it showed merely a quiet reach in a river, with overhanging trees in the middle distance, a church spire beyond them, and a sloping bank with stunted willows in shadow in the foreground.

"I may have been there, but I don't recognize it," said Gilbert.

"Try to recollect. I do not choose my sketches so much for their beauty as their associations. When I was at Ashton this spot interested me extremely; I went there many times."

"Then it is somewhere on the Forde. Is it Marton?"

"The river below Marton."

It was the place where Gilbert had rescued his schoolfellow from drowning.

"Turn on," said he. Helen had expected some comment, but he made none.

The next view was Langhope Tower, dull and dreary. It had been taken on a sunless day, and was not effective. Gilbert uncourteously said so.

"I am a poor artist, I know; but it pleases me to keep reminiscences of places where I have had happy days," returned Helen quietly. She was not mortified: Mr. Massenger's blunt rejoinders never had that effect on her.

"If you will give me a pencil I will make it more like what I remember it," said Gilbert.

Helen complied gladly, and he proceeded to work in deep shadows, while she sat watching. So intent did she become, that unconsciously she approached her face so close to his that her warm, perfumed breath swept over his cheek and brow like the caress of the south-west wind—balmy, fresh, life-inspiring.

"That is moonlight," said Helen, as the lights came out from black, wall masses, under the touch of a master-hand.

"There!" gasped poor Gilbert, throwing the pencil down, and raising his head with an effort.

"Thank you; I like it very much," replied Helen, and taking the book in her hand she went over to her uncle and Noel Forester to exhibit it.

The character of the insignificant little drawing was quite altered; Gilbert had set his own mark upon it—a gloomy power, a strong, uncheering truth. It was Langhope, but Langhope in an autumn night, when the maiden moon is harassed by armies of storm-drifts marching swiftly over her domains; when winds are revelling unbridled upon heath and hill; when the great forest trees

are bare of leaf, and the grass is all brown and withered.

Helen came back to the table, and hovered round Gilbert for a few minutes, but as he did not speak, or even look at her, she retreated to her sofa corner and sat down alone. Presently, Noel Forester took his departure, and then William Grahame, as if relieved from society that did not suit him, drew his chair closer to the fire, bade Gilbert do the same, and summoned Helen to a low stool at his feet. "You have been as gay as a lark to-night, little one," said he; "you have borne nearly all the *frais* of the conversation."

"You are tired, uncle, and I am afraid Mr. Massenger is not well—are you?" asked Helen, glancing up at him with beaming eye.

"Thank you, Miss Leigh, I am perfectly well," replied Gilbert, stiffly.

Helen saw now that she was the cause of his gloom, and wondered how she had vexed him. It seemed to her that she had been very kind, and that he was unreasonable; she turned her

eyes to the fire, and remained for some minutes sunk in meditation.

"Men have cares such as do not enter into elfish pates like yours, Helen," said her uncle, gazing down affectionately at her grave face. "Are you marvelling what business they have to bring them where you are?"

"No; how could I be so foolish? I do not like those people the best who are always sleek and comfortable, as if nothing could either charm them or ruffle them. One may be too gentle."

"Then, on the whole, you prefer bad temper."

"Oh, uncle William! don't pretend to misunderstand me. I cannot bear savage surly people, who take offence at trifles, or, if they cannot find a cause, make or fancy one."

Gilbert flushed; the stroke, though not aimed at him, struck hard and struck home. He was a barbarian in her eyes; he could not be anything else; she must hate him: his presence must be offensive, obnoxious to her: these thoughts whirled through his mind, and sent a burning torrent to his brow. "Fool, that I am!" cried he mentally,

in a fierce spasm of pain; "fool, blind and besotted! Where I would most please, there I inevitably disgust!"

He rose in great haste and left the room; he could bear the calm atmosphere of Helen's presence no longer in his stormy mood. He went out into the little garden, to its one secluded, sheltered path. It was a dark night, without moon or star; the wind was high, and brought showers on its sharp gusts. The thick fallen leaves drove before them with rustling, eerie sound, as if the black sweep of ghostly raiment moved amongst them; the shrubs dripped rain, like passionate tears—slow, heavy, sounding on the rotting foliage as if they wept for summer past. Gilbert stood still and let the showers fall on his head and upturned face; his eyes sought for an opening in heaven, but it was all a dull, gray blank—darkness solid as a wall.

He watched; he waited. "I take it as a type of my fate," he thought.

Gradually towards the east the clouds melted to a thin veil, white as mist. On their lower edge

a faint, reflected light dawned palely; grew, spread, brightened: then up rose the full orbed moon, clear, unchequered, and rode triumphantly over half heaven. There, overhead, lay a bar of inky cloud, black, dense, unbroken. How was the night changed! The moon passed behind it, and all was again thick darkness—a darkness that might be felt. A convulsive shudder ran through Gilbert's frame from head to foot. "Superstitious dolt that I am!" said he half aloud.

Again the rain fell, but no longer in soft showers: it came in straight, pitiless lines. For a while he withstood its fury—dared it, almost; but at last he sought the shelter of the porch, shivering, weak, and drenched. Soon the moon again peered out, but its full glory was gone;—worn or washed away by the storm: clouds pursued it, flew over its broad disk, hung on its skirts like an army of skirmishers. Down in the west there was less tumult; the light was softer, dimmer than it had been, but it was calm and general; the very clouds were suffused and lost in it.

"What does it mean?" said Gilbert, to himself. "I cannot read it—I do not comprehend it."

Subdued and quietened he went into the house. Helen had vanished, and William Grahame was alone; he was smoking his evening cigar in his sanctum and invited Gilbert to join him, but the latter declined, and they separated. Till far into the night the old bachelor heard a heavy, restless step pacing the chamber which adjoined his own: "Poor fellow!" thought he, "it is what we have all of us gone through more or less severely;" and so tried to compose himself to sleep.

XXX.

The Sabbath rose on that October morning, almost like a midsummer day. The clouds had passed with the night, and the rains had refreshed the few flowers which still brightened the garden beds. Helen was standing by the window when Gilbert entered the sitting room, looking out at the clear, cloudless sky; she turned instantly, gave him her

hand, and in her capacity of hostess inquired if he were better—she was sure he must have been ill the night before. Gilbert answered carelessly; he had nerved himself up to get through the day as well as he could, and had determined henceforward to keep himself out of the reach of the sweet temptation. If Helen was never to be his it was weak, unmanly to follow her with his thoughts —it would seem ridiculous to her, and it was ener vating for him; it must be abandoned.

Helen and her uncle were strict church-goers; Gilbert accompanied them to the morning service, but in the afternoon he preferred keeping the house. For some little time after they were gone he endeavoured to occupy himself with a book, but presently sinking into a reflective mood, it fell from his hand; his head lay idly back on the arm of the sofa, and at last, lulled by the dreary silence of the house and previous fatigue, he dropped asleep. In this condition Helen found him when she entered the parlour on her return; moving with a light foot she did not awake him, and as her uncle had stayed in the garden to smoke, he was permitted

to rest undisturbed. Coming round to the fire, Helen faced her sleeping guest; she could not forbear a smile as she looked at him, thinking in her own mind that he was a shade less grim thus than when awake. His features were calm as death, or marble; his mouth slightly depressed; the heavy locks of purple-black hair pushed up from his wide forehead as if with an impatient hand. His breathing was very low and quiet; he seemed as if under the influence of a pleasant dream.

Helen drew up a screen gently betwixt him and the fire, and then sat down to read. Again and again her eyes wandered from the page to the countenance of Gilbert; it seemed as if he were quite different from what she had ever before known him. She remembered having either heard or read that in natural sleep the face betrays without veil, without effort, the disposition; if this were true, how contrary to all preconceived notions was Gilbert Massenger's character. There was no fierceness, no eagerness; only a quiet expression of will and power on the brow, and even tenderness on the folded lips.

"Poor fellow! he never had any one to be kind to him: I daresay he could be gentle if he tried," thought Helen; "I should think so from his mouth. I am sure I shall never be afraid of him again."

The sun getting round towards the west shone in at the window on Gilbert's head; Helen rose to lower the blind, and in passing behind the couch laid her hand, soft, cool, and fragrant as a rose-leaf, on his forehead. With a quick, gasping sigh he awoke.

"Oh, I am so sorry I roused you!" said Helen, blushing and drawing back: "I did not intend to do so, indeed."

Gilbert believed her, and hastily uttered an apology for his rudeness: he was glad she had awoke him; he ought not to have slept at all. He spoke in his natural tone; the painful constraint was gone. In short, he was not unconscious of that gentle touch, and it had unsealed the frozen waters beneath which feeling was congealed.

"I am not odious to her—not hateful: I may venture to speak to her. What nerve would I leave

unstrained to win her if it were possible for her to love me: is it possible?" As these thoughts flickered through his mind, he looked full on Helen. She had been regarding him, studying him, and her eyes sank before his direct, unwavering glance: the blood, too, flushed warm in her cheek.

"He has found me out," said she to herself: "perhaps he is thinking me forward, just at this moment when I have discovered that there is nothing about him to scare me, and when I really could begin to be kind to him if he would let me."

At this moment William Grahame came in, and his presence relieved both from a growing embarrassment.

XXXI.

"Helen, child, where is the Book? You will read to us: Mr. Massenger will not object."

It was evening; tea was over; the fire bright,

the lamp lighted: the room, with its crimson furniture, its few good pictures, and its general aspect of refined taste, was a pretty home-like frame for the group round the hearth. William Grahame's gray head contrasted honourable age with graceful youth in Helen's beside him. Gilbert was the type of strong, earnest manhood; restless, struggling; the blandishments of hopeful juvenile days left behind; the still haven of content unattained.

William Grahame was a man of real and pure but unobtrusive piety; Helen's good had not been more assiduously cared for by her grandfather Leigh than it was by him: every religious habit that he had implanted her uncle maintained and cultivated.

At his bidding, therefore, Helen brought out the large Bible, laid it on the table, and proceeded to select the chapters for her evening's reading. Gilbert watched her with an agreeable interest; he considered it extremely right and proper for women to be religious: it was a tendency in their nature which ought to be encouraged. He listened with attention; his external behaviour was always

reverent: whatsoever were his own opinions, he did not outrage others by intruding them out of season. Except in the public services of the church, he had not heard the Bible read since he had quitted his aunt's house; neither had he studied it privately. It was a dead letter to him still: he neither feared it, believed it, nor, perhaps, altogether doubted it; he just passed it over carelessly as a thing he could live without: in fine, he was the practical atheist which thousands and tens of thousands are whose profession stands fair and honest before all men.

Helen chose those two beautiful chapters of the Gospel in which the beloved disciple records his Divine Master's discourse to His faithful servants before His betrayal: that comforting farewell in which He speaks to them of heaven as the rest to which He first departs that He may receive them when their time of tribulation shall be ended; in which He also reminds them of the great measure of His love, which is ready to lay down life itself for them, and bids them be of good cheer, for that the world's persecution endures but for a season,

and then follows the peace which passeth all understanding.

Then she went through that prayer, so touching and so exquisite, preferred to God by His holy Son when His hour was come, and the work finished which He had given Him to do: the petition that those He had won might be kept safe for the day of His redemption, and be with Him in glory.

Swiftly upon those eternal words follows the dark history of the betrayal.

The reader's voice changed and thrilled; Gilbert bent a rapt ear: "his heart burned within him."

Stealthily through the night comes the son of perdition, with his band of armed men, to where Jesus rests. There is no evasion; no human fear of human might and injustice: He stands forth at once, and proclaims, "I am He whom you seek."

Then that apostle in whom love had not yet overcome passion—nor fearful weakness—raises the strong hand for his master's deliverance—raises

it vainly. They lead Him away; then some forsake Him and fly—some follow him *afar off*—one, the proud, the self-confident, the violent, avers with an oath that he knows Him not. Betrayed, forsaken, denied, He stands before His heathen judge; arraigned on a false charge, testified against by suborned witnesses, hunted to death by the people He came to save. That pagan—time-serving as he was—would fain deliver Him, but is overpowered by the cries of the turbulent multitude, and yields Him against his own conscience to die the death.

Up Calvary's steep they follow Him bearing His cross, crowned with thorns, bruised and beaten; and there, with two thieves, they crucify Him—their King, Saviour, and God. Standing near are the few whose courage is equal to their love: His mother, her heart pierced with the sword also, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and St. John. Strong in the hour of tribulation is love like theirs! stronger than any other passion of humanity.

Then sound those pregnant words, "It is

finished!" Finished the pain, finished the suffering, finished the great plan and mystery of man's redemption; begun the eternal reign of the Mediator at God's right hand. The despised and rejected is become a Prince and a Saviour—the scorn of men, the outcast of the people, is King for evermore!

XXXII.

It was a new story to Gilbert; his heart melted at those pitiful details: but it was the agony of the Man that touched him, not the great mercy of God. It was the faithful leader of the people, the bold preacher, the courageous reformer of old abuses, that appealed to his sympathies: persecuted by jealous rulers, dreaded by the two-faced Pharisee; first hailed as king by the triumphant mob, then hooted to His cross by voices that a few months before had shouted, "Hosanna!" Betrayed by one friend, denied by another, forsaken in His extremity by all; dying without

complaint—mortal in His suffering—divine in His end.

"A grand, a noble history it is; but to what a low mark does it show that humanity can fall in time of danger or temptation!" thought Gilbert. "Peter boasts; then lies, through fear of sharing his master's punishment—base, contemptible!—and yet this very man lives to glorify his crucified Lord by suffering persecution in His name, and finally to redeem his weakness by martyrdom. And others, more than we can count, have been found sufficient for their day, by Christ's strengthening them."

Helen had closed the book and left the table for her seat at her uncle's knee; she now began to talk to him in a low voice. Without listening Gilbert could not hear all she said, but occasionally a few words caught his ear: she seemed to be giving an abstract of some discourse she had heard—perhaps the afternoon's sermon. While she spoke thus the expression of her countenance was elevated, sublimed, instinct with feeling. You saw that she could endure as well as love; that she had the high

heart which will glow for the sacrifice when right demands it. Through her eyes looked out the spirit of a noble, courageous woman; the type of what time and experience were yet to make her.

The young man bent forward to hear; she was saying—"it is the gift of God."

"What is the gift of God?" he asked himself, for Helen had paused and seemed confused: she had noticed Gilbert's face when she began to read; since that moment she had not looked at him;—perhaps she had discovered in him one who had "neither part nor lot in the matter."

"Go on, child," said her uncle, without observing her hesitation; "what did the good man say more?"

"He said that by the law can no man be justified; that we are judged according to our works, but saved by Christ through faith in His name. Then he spoke of the difference between a living faith and a dead faith; of the happy fruits of a good life, and the Christian's sure prospect of heaven. He compared the ambitions of earth which men follow as if they were the end of all,

to the joy of the saints—their evanescent, unsatisfying nature, to the undying peace of those who look beyond the grave. He said how unreasonable it was to give only the dregs of life to God; and warned us of the danger of deferring our repentance from day to day when we know that at any moment our soul may be required of us. He gave encouragement to the weak, and strength to the wavering; comfort to the afflicted, and courage to fight against temptation to those whose trial was beginning, and ended by saying, that God never placed His creatures in any circumstance of danger or difficulty out of which the guiddance of His Holy Word was not able to deliver them."

"Well remembered, Helen! and blessed are they that take that Holy Word as a lamp for their feet," said William Grahame.

"He quoted also the true saying, 'man's extremity is God's opportunity,' and reminded the careless or indifferent that though it may be easy to *live* without God, it is hard to *die* without Him. He asked what they would do 'in the swelling of

Jordan' if they had not made good their claim to the help of Him who is ready to seek and to save."

Helen had rested her bright head against her uncle's knee, and his gentle hand lay lightly upon it; the two sat awhile silent—both at rest in their minds, if their countenances were the index of feeling. Gilbert felt himself an anomaly in such company; his ways and thoughts were not theirs: it seemed almost as if he were guilty of a deception in sitting by to listen to their discourse. And yet it was pleasant to him; it did not harden or ruffle: there was nothing in what he heard to excite revolt, but everything to win.

When he thought at all of death, he knew that there must be a soul within him which would never perish: whither should that soul go? whither, if suddenly called away that night? He could not tell—it was a black void; only he had a vague hope that God will not utterly destroy any creature that he has made—would not, therefore, destroy him. This had been sufficient hitherto, but, as he listened to Helen, this hope trembled in the scale of his judgment; tried thereby it was

found wanting—it was false measure, and could not pass. Yet—like Felix—he strove to put it off to a more convenient season. Then conscience, vanquished, retired into its stronghold until its hour should again come round—come, possibly, as a fierce avenger, a fiery trial, since the "still, small voice" was unheeded.

XXXIII.

Ten o'clock struck by the time-piece over the chimney; Gilbert must go: he would not remain the night, because if he did so he should be tempted to subtract a couple of hours or even more from the morrow.

"I wish you would always spend the Sunday with us, Massenger," said William Grahame, as he shook him by the hand; "you are heartily welcome: I like your company, and that is more than I can say for most young men."

"I shall look for your coming next Saturday: don't forget;" added Helen, hesitatingly yet

kindly: she was not sure that he had forgotten the yet unknown cause of offence, and as it grieved her to be on bad terms with any one, she wished to part friends. Gilbert walked home on air. The pleasant summer-like day had yielded to a chilly, wet night; the lamps gleamed redly through the fog, and people who were forced to be abroad kept under shelter of the houses, while the homeless vagabonds—the lees of mortality—huddled themselves out of sight where they could, glad of any covering from the penetrating rain. The storm had almost emptied the streets; Gilbert relished the solitude: he wanted no company but the echo of Helen's voice, which responded to his thoughts like a softer tone of the same chord. Sometimes a bustling personage well-protected in armour of water-proof glistened past him; then again gaunt poverty fluttering in rags, or tawdry vice shivering in tinsel, crept by under the dripping eaves and melted away in the fog.

Everything had a misty, unreal aspect to him. Even when he came to where a crowd was gathering to witness that grand street tragedy, an awful

fire, he looked on apathetically: the superhuman exertions of men to save life and property, the shouts of the mob, the frantic cheering when a woman was brought out from amidst blazing ruins by an individual who had risked destruction to save her, he remembered afterwards, dimly and indistinctly, as we remember things seen in a dream—not as living realities enacted before his eyes.

On reaching his lodgings he went to rest immediately; he would have no single thought of toil and struggle come betwixt him and his love.

XXXIV.

While Gilbert sat drawing out certain plans the next morning, he was broken in upon by a visit from Noel Forester.

"I am off to Langhope to-morrow, and could not go without seeing you again, Massenger," said he, in his heartiest voice and with a cordial grasp.

Gilbert pushed a chair over by the fire, and bade him sit down.

"William Grahame tells me he met you at Ashton last spring: how did it chance that you passed the old Tower within a stone's throw without calling? I was at home, and am more than half disposed to take it ill of you;" added Noel.

Gilbert chose to evade the question, not thinking it needful to explain his circumstances as they then were; and asked his old rival about former schoolfellows and his own doings.

"What have I done?" echoed the gay young fellow; "done?—why nothing. I am always *going* to do something; but unfortunately the right moment has not yet turned up: in the mean time I am enjoying myself."

Gilbert alluded to the afore-named book of poems, at which Noel blushed ingenuously. "That was entirely a mistake; the critics drowned me in their inkstands as ruthlessly as if I had been an untimely kitten. I felt for three months after I printed my 'Aspirations' as if I had roused a nest of hornets, which stung me in all tender, exposed

spots with a gleeful malignity, such as no other animals but critics and hornets ever experience. I'm recovered now, but it was a full year before I could bear touching on the raw."

"Miss Leigh approves them," said Gilbert: this was put out as a feeler.

"*I* gave them to her," returned Forester, with a revival of the blush; "I had them done up in green morocco and gold for the purpose: she praised them and scolded the reviews sweetly, for she would not hurt a spider. But *admire* them! No, no! She is too sensible for that. There are a few lines which haunt me to this hour for their silliness; they won't be laid: like uncomfortable ghosts they are ever obtruding unseasonably, and making one feel hot all over. I shall not do it again."

"You know Miss Leigh well, don't you?" asked Gilbert.

"She was only a little girl when she was at Ashton with the Doctor, but I saw her often and liked her; since then we had not met until Saturday evening: but I feel to claim her as an inti-

mate. What a fresh, pleasant creature she is! she has not lost the scent of her native heather yet: it is not often you see such a girl."

Gilbert was satisfied, for Forester spoke coolly; not with the enthusiastic admiration of a lover: this gave greater freedom to the Man of Iron's speech; he even, at the request of his old comrade, gave an outline of his own battling with adversity. The other listened attentively: what a contrast did his own indolent, maundering existence present to that of the energetic man before him! How uninteresting and inactive was his present life, how aimless its future, in comparison!

"And I daresay you were happy enough through it all," remarked Noel curiously, when he had heard enough to assure him that Gilbert's course had been one of unremitting exertion.

"*Happy* is not the word to express the state of a man who has to work without ceasing, and whose faculties are always on the stretch," answered the other. "The severity of the tension precludes all possibility of the repose of *happiness;* but if you had said I was not *unhappy,* you would

have hit the mark more nearly. There is to me a certain fierce enjoyment in the struggle; I liked to measure my strength with the occasion, and to feel that I was equal to it—more than equal to it. Never—even in the darkest moments—did I doubt that ultimately I should win my race: if I had feared, the chances are ten to one that I should have failed—failed utterly and miserably."

"What you might have done with my opportunities!" exclaimed Forester, forced to admire a character so diverse from his own.

"There is no saying; I think it is fortunate for me that I have been driven to my own resources: those never go far who rely on any but themselves."

Forester assented dubiously: he had little independence, either natural or acquired, himself, and was far from wishing to prove the difficult problems of life in his own person; though the details of them, as worked by another, were interesting.

Gradually the conversation turned round again to Noel, who said that after a short visit to his father and mother at Langhope, he was going to

Rome, where he proposed to winter, and afterwards he should probably stretch his travels through Greece and the Levant: Jasper Lowndes was to be his companion.

"Ah! the poet!" cried Gilbert, with a laugh—he had a subtle laugh, a sarcastic laugh—which made Noel wince at the recollection of his own exploits in that line; "what of him? How does he get on? Has he set the Thames on fire yet?"

"No, he will never do it; he is too thrifty and respectable to be a genuine son of Parnassus," replied Forester: "he has money in the Funds."

"What! of his own earning?"

"Yes; surely. His muse deserves encouragement, and gets it: she is decently draped, and speaks in pretty, rounded sentences, such as may be liberally quoted by ladies' albums; and his *bouts rimés* are beyond impeachment. He is a lion also, and roars mellifluously to almost any tune. He is a very good-natured fellow to travel with, and useful too; for he takes the people in hand when they are exacting, and rows them in a medley

of tongues culled from the choicest vocabularies, while I enjoy my cigar and look on."

"I say, Forester, what has come over you? why are you so indolent?" asked the other suddenly; "we all expected you to turn out a distinguished man."

"Semper eadem!" cried Noel, with a forced laugh: "you remember me at school—wishing instead of working."

"Set to in earnest—do something."

"What? Show me how."

"Have you not discovered your vocation yet?"

"I have thought so half a score times, but on trial it has turned out a failure."

"All froth and sparkle; no true metal in him," thought Gilbert.

These were two natures that never could amalgamate, any more than fire and water. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel," might with great safety be prophesied of Noel Forester. When he was gone Gilbert breathed more freely: his chest seemed to expand, his spirits to dilate. Asking himself the reason of this exhilaration, there came

a satisfactory reply. "Forester is going abroad immediately, therefore he has no powerful attraction in England—(Norwood was the whole United Kingdom at present)—no rivalry to dread from him, consequently."

"Steady!" cried Reason; "you go too fast. Curb your flight, Imagination; come down to the working world, and see what is to be done there, before you claim a guerdon. Have something besides yourself to offer: be sober and patient. Don't let passion run away with you, lest you risk a rebuff." And, with a suppressed sigh, Gilbert betook himself once more to his interrupted labours.

XXXV.

During the whole of that week it so happened that William Grahame did not once appear at Gilbert's lodgings; on the Friday evening, however, he received a note by post, reminding him of his engagement, with the explanation that

Helen having been unwell for some days past her uncle had not been able to leave her.

Earlier than his wont, and a prey to wretched forebodings, Gilbert set out for Norwood on Saturday afternoon, and arrived about dusk. William Grahame came out to meet him: "Brother Tom is here, but we hope it is only a severe cold," were his first words—only too pregnant of meaning to Gilbert.

They went into the parlour, where the Doctor sat poring over a book. Helen's sofa corner was deserted; her work-box put aside; the piano closed. Gilbert's look round the room asked explanation. William Grahame promptly understood, and gave it.

"It was thought best for her to keep her bed, as there was no saying what it might turn to. Melvil, our surgeon, advised it;" and, having said this, he went up-stairs to look after his darling.

When they were alone together the Doctor began to talk.

"I would not make William anxious more than needs," said he; "but there is no doubt the child

has caught a fever. She went last Monday to see a servant who left ill, and whose complaint is low fever. She got wet in coming home, and has been ailing ever since. She is now quite delirious. Last night when I arrived she did not know me."

Gilbert's heart beat thick and fast; he scarcely dared to listen to his whispering fears, and tried to drown them by talking with an enforced calm that he was very far from feeling.

"She will get over it easily: she always seemed strong," said he.

"Yes; her constitution is sound as a bell, and she has the best heart in the world; she never desponds, and is patient, William says, as a lamb," replied the Doctor.

Presently William Grahame returned to the parlour; his countenance was grave and depressed, and he sat down without speaking. Mr. Melvil had just been and gone. The Doctor asked what he had said about Helen.

"It is worse than I feared; she has caught that poor girl's fever," was his answer.

The evening passed very quietly: they all

missed the blithe company and bonnie lightsome face of Helen, and were too anxious to talk much on indifferent matters. William Grahame neglected his cigar, and the Doctor gazed through dim spectacles, to no profit, at his old volume of divinity.

The morrow came and went in the same watchful, anxious mood. Helen was worse: Mr. Melvil said the fever approached a crisis.

Late at night Gilbert returned to his lodgings. It would be vain to attempt analyzing his feelings. It was as if the world contained but one thought, one sensation, and that concentred in Helen's life. He would not look possibilities in the face: she *must* live—live for him! He willed it powerfully, emphatically. Every evening during the ensuing week found him on his way to Norwood: no impediment was suffered to prevent him. Punctually at nine o'clock he joined the Doctor and his brother in their quiet waiting: his coming always cheered them, and was as an infusion of Hope in their cup of sorrow. The progress of the disease was slow, yet violent in its effects.

"It is Helen's shadow, not Helen's self we pos-

sess," said William Grahame, on the Friday evening, his fine voice quivering as he spoke. The fever had then passed its climax; the poor girl was worn and wasted by her journey through the valley of the shadow of death; but the glassy insensibility had passed from her eyes, and the flush of suffering from her cheeks. Gilbert asked if he might see her. The Doctor seemed amazed at the request, but his brother said, "Yes, if Helen liked;" and went forthwith to ask her.

Helen was aware how unwearying Gilbert had been in coming to inquire after her, and what a consolation his frequent visits were to her uncles; so she said he might come up: she wished to thank him.

It was curious to see the Man of Iron's grim mouth and deep dark eyes soften to almost womanly tenderness as Helen laid her little wasted hand in his. With a quick, irrepressible impulse he stooped down and touched it with his lips; the action seemed only natural: a spontaneous ebullition of feeling which could express itself in no other way. Helen smiled, and said, in a weary

voice, that she thanked him very much for his attention to Uncle William while she had been ill: he would have been very dull without him. She added that he must come on Sunday, as usual, for she hoped to go down stairs for a little while in the afternoon: at which announcement William Grahame shook his head, saying, they must not be rash and venturesome.

There seemed, indeed, no prospect of a speedy renewal of her strength, judging by her thin, worn, colourless face; but the same strong, hopeful spirit looked out of her large starlike eyes beneath as calm a brow as ever. It was the lassitude of excessive weakness that hung about her which made her voice so faint and her glance so slow; but all her mental perceptions were vivid as in health. Gilbert Massenger's mute emotion did not escape her; unconsciously, as it seemed, after that caress he kept her hand in his, and stroked the delicate fingers with his own—gently, lovingly, as a mother would do to her sick child. His touch might have sent a warm thrill of vigorous life through her frame, for she brightened sensibly

while he stood by her: perhaps it did, such subtle affinities are there in our nature. His very soul yearned for her. "Oh, live!" it supplicated: "live to bless me, Helen! live to save me!"

He was scarcely five minutes in the room from first to last, but during that brief space he had a glimpse of a better, a purer, a higher life than any he had ever imagined: he could not doubt that, for Helen, and such as Helen, to "die would be gain." She was his good angel, for she turned his thoughts inwards, and constrained him to feel how different was his strictly regulated life to one overshadowed by the acknowledged love and power of God. Earthly ambitions and earthly affections were his highest aspirations; the narrow grave his utmost horizon.

XXXVI.

During the Saturday Gilbert Massenger received an offer of an extremely advantageous kind, to direct certain engineering operations which were

being carried forward in North Wales. At any other moment how eagerly would he have grasped at such a chance, but now it was impossible for him to leave London; he said so decisively, and the affair was quashed. What was his mere professional advancement to his anxiety for Helen, whose frail steps still hovered near the brink of eternity? He could not, would not leave her for any consideration on earth: he would not have left her if by that refusal he had closed against himself every prospect in the future. His heart was knit to her with inextricable bonds: everything but Helen and her love had faded into dim insignificance. Where she was were happiness, contentment, hope; exiled from her there might be life indeed, but a life scarce worth the tenure by which it is held—blank, chill, dreary—a winter without sun, a night without moon or star, a long gray day, twilight from morn to eve.

He spent the Sunday at Norwood, and again saw Helen for a few minutes: but she did not leave her room: she was out in her calculations there; it was not until a fortnight later that

Mr. Melvil would hear of such a thing; and even then there were multiplied warnings and restrictions which betrayed that care—the tenderest care—was called for still: so nearly had the springs of life failed.

During the interim, Dr. Grahame had returned to his school, and on Helen's first coming downstairs, her uncle William and Gilbert Massenger had her to themselves. It was on this wise. The two were sitting by the fire, in the twilight, just before tea, when the nurse who had attended Helen through her illness, came to the door and said that Miss Leigh would like to come down.

"What do you think, nurse? Is there any risk?" asked her uncle.

"Why no, sir: I daresay the change would liven her up and do her good."

"Then by all means let her come. Massenger, we will go and see."

Helen was waiting in a tiny boudoir, which was her own exclusive property—her sulky, she called it; and when the two appeared she said, with an unmistakeable touch of her former gaiety, "Uncle

William, I protest against being kept in imprisonment any longer; if somebody won't take me downstairs, I will go by myself."

"Ay, wilful sprite, I know you are better by that very tone!" cried her uncle; "I must carry you then; you are too tender yet to walk: eh, Mistress Nurse?"

"Yes, sir; you had best lift her. It has taken sad hold on her; but I never saw better heart: that has done more for her than Mr. Melvil."

As the nurse spoke she wrapped a shawl about her patient, who smilingly persisted that with an arm she could manage very well on her own feet, and that she did not wish to be carried like a bundle.

"Give her your arm, then, Massenger, and I'll bring the cushions," said William Grahame.

But poor Helen's will was better than her strength; before she had got to the door the room seemed swimming round. Gilbert lifted her in his arms without waiting for remonstrance; for greater safety she instinctively clung with one hand round his neck, and the procession started. When laid gently down on the sofa, she kept her eyes closed

for a minute or two; her breath came in short gasps, and a flickering colour played over her cheeks; on looking up again with a wan smile, she saw her uncle and Gilbert leaning over her, both rather dismayed at the effects of the short journey.

"Why, Helen, you are something akin to thistle-down; a breath of wind would blow you away altogether," said William Grahame.

Gilbert did not speak: his great frame was thrilling with too strong an emotion. While he held the poor child against his breast, he had thought it would be like tearing out his heart to take her away from him; yet that slight exertion had seemed to make her soul tremble on her lips. He let her uncle arrange the sofa pillows and spread a cover over her feet: he did not dare then to risk the betrayal of his love, which was quivering in every nerve he had—stung into keener life by the near contact of her frail form.

"There now, we have packed you up comfortably," said her uncle, when he had completed all the arrangements: "how do you feel, little one?"

"Nicely. I am in no haste to be well—it is so

pleasant to be petted," answered she: "I believe I like to be made much of."

Uncle William pinched her cheek, called her roguish elf, and expressed a conviction that she was playing the old soldier and could dance a hornpipe if she only made an effort; which assertion brought a laugh both to mouth and eyes. Undoubtedly the change did her good, for by the time tea was brought in she was quite in a condition to find fault: not, it must be acknowledged, without substantial reason. Uncle William, flurried and happy to see her so much improved, was quite absent as to everything else, and tried to make the "drink which cheers but not inebriates" without applying to the tea-caddy at all. Helen asked if he expected her to partake of the infusion of hot water? she should disappoint him if he did, as she had a decided prejudice against the beverage. The blunders he made were many; Helen asked if that was the style in which he had entertained the Doctor.

"No, no," said he; "Tom took the tea-pot under his own patronage, and never suffered me to meddle."

"He should have stayed longer; he might have waited until I was well."

"But the school, Helen. However, I have promised that we will both go and spend our Christmas with him if you are well enough to travel so far; and, if not, he comes to us—does that please my wee tyrant?"

"Entirely."

The poor girl was not able to talk much, but she lay amongst the cushions looking very contented and tranquil, and extremely pretty, though fragile as the wild wood-anemone. A cap of some thin white material covered her head, whence the wealth of rich brown hair had been ruthlessly cut; but a few tresses were left to shade the broad purity of her brow. Gilbert sat at the opposite side of the room, rather behind the couch, so that his long, lingering glances did not embarrass her: he looked at her more covetously than the miser at his soul-bought gold.

This did not escape the observation of William Grahame, neither had the other signs of Gilbert's absorbed interest in Helen; but now, for the first

time, it gave him an ill-defined sense of uneasiness—an uneasiness which he could not explain to himself nor yet get rid of. It struck him more strongly still, when, before leaving, Gilbert carried Helen back to her room, and was thanked by her with a grateful smile that sent him away happy and exultant.

"What *ill* can come of it? None, surely," said the old bachelor to himself; but the answer was not satisfactory.

XXXVII.

Helen's recovery was very slow and gradual; the weather being unfavourable, it was impossible for her to leave the house, and this probably retarded it still further. Gilbert Massenger's visits were now a pleasure looked forward to with eagerness; not only that they made a change in the long and uneventful week, but that she had a real enjoyment in his presence. Her brief period of suffering had matured her mind; she had cast off childhood, its ways and thoughts completely,

when she issued again into vivid life. She could be no longer blind to the warm affection she had won, and she experienced a proud, tender satisfaction at the sight of it. She felt safe and protected under Gilbert's care, looking up to him as worthy of honour as well as love: his was a character that invited reliance, not doubt; though he had not, in so many words, professed his attachment, there were a hundred unmistakeable signs whereby he continually betrayed it. These were enough for Helen. "He loves me; I am happy, and can wait for its avowal patiently," said her heart.

Doubtless this was a time of deep contentment to both of them; to Gilbert no less than to Helen.

"I am glad you have come." "I have watched for you nearly an hour." "I always expect Saturday evening with pleasure." What did these greetings, and such as these, mean, but that he was to her more than others—more and dearer? He understood them so, and was satisfied. He would ask nothing further yet; he would not risk spilling the nectar of life by striving to drain it too hastily, or at a single draught; the mere sight

of the charmed cup must be sufficient for some time to come: he could the more easily withhold his hand when he knew it was within reach.

XXXVIII.

The fact of Gilbert Massenger's having refused a lucrative engagement was not long in oozing out and coming to William Grahame's ears. He was at no loss as to the motive which had actuated him in this, from the time of its occurrence; and, though he admired the young man's genuine and unselfish nature, he thought fit to take him to task for this neglect of his interests.

"I know, however," added he, "that the appointment has not yet been given away, and I advise you to apply for it at once: it is a chance which may be the making of you, and therefore it ought not to be lost."

Though Gilbert would have greatly preferred remaining within reach of Norwood, the absurdity of neglecting the means by which ultimately he might attain to the possession of Helen was evi-

dent. He, therefore, made his application in form to the directors of the works, and was accepted.

For this sensible advanced step he was indebted, though he knew it not, to Mr. Forester of Langhope.

Gilbert was to leave London the week before Christmas; the two days previous he spent chiefly at Norwood. Helen and he had insensibly exchanged the use of the ceremonious surname for the more friendly Christian one: "Gilbert" slipped as easily and musically from her tongue as did "Helen" from his. William Grahame observed it at first, but now he was letting matters take their course; whatever the end, they were too far advanced to receive check effectually, even had he wished to administer it: which he did not. He liked Massenger's character; his disposition had a foundation of great kindness: his fine traits were many; his rough ones such as his love of Helen would correct. He knew him to be conscientious; he thought him religious; for so reverent was his behaviour, and so unobtrusive his opinions, that on this point it was easy to be mistaken: his training

had been of the strictest, and no doubts on the matter were likely to cross the mind of even more observant persons than Helen's uncle. That he would rise to a fair position seemed probable; and what more could he ask for Helen? he would rather see her happy than exalted.

The one bitter drop in this promising cup was the hereditary taint of blood; but, like too many, William Grahame was not disposed to concede to it the first importance. He was sanguine; indulged himself in perhapses and possibilities that it might never manifest itself again, until he was convinced that he need be under no anxiety: he was doubtful whether Massenger had been made aware of it, as no allusion to such a matter had ever fallen from him; and, thinking on the subject as he did, he assumed it best not to enlighten him if he were indeed in ignorance.

During the last evening the conversation turned on the approaching visit to Ashton.

"Mrs. Forester has asked us to go over to Langhope while we are down in that part of the country," said Helen.

Gilbert started: it was like a sudden chill to him, the sound of that name; even though he recalled that Noel Forester was absent in Italy. All the rest of the night he was nervous and distracted; he would have spoken out to Helen, but no opportunity occurred—her uncle was always there. He regretted now that he had not bound her to him by a promise: it would not have been unjust. At last the parting came—deferred certainly until the last moment; but when the clock was on the stroke of eleven, he was ashamed to linger longer, and rose to go. His kind friend shook him heartily by the hand, wishing him every success. Gilbert then turned to Helen, who stood near him with a rather pale little face: the separation was for an eternity of three months, remember, and their mutual love was unconfessed.

"Come out into the garden, Helen, there is a lovely moon," whispered he; and somehow he got her little hand in his close, warm clasp, and drew her out of the room, while her Uncle William cried, "Massenger, don't be mad: it is a bitter

frost;" then added to himself, when they were beyond hearing, "Youth will have its day."

It was indeed a cold, sharp night; but neither felt it.

"Helen, you know I love you—I cannot go without speaking," said Gilbert, quickly: "give me a promise that you will be mine when I dare to claim you." A cold gust of wind carried Helen's answer out of everybody's hearing, save his; but it caused him to lift her in his arms, strain her to his heart, and call her his "Sweet life—his joy—his hope—his darling."

"Put your hand in mine, Helen; let me hear you say you trust me—you love me."

"I do, Gilbert—I trust you entirely;" and the frank eyes, glistening with tears, lifted themselves to his face.

"You love me?"

"Yes."

Another frantic strain to his heart, a long kiss—the first, the last—and he was gone.

Helen stood under the porch for a few seconds, and then went in. Her tell-tale eyes saved her

explanation with her uncle: he understood what had passed. "Wait patiently, my pet; he will make you happy: I have seen it in his face all along. Brother Tom's warning has come true: I shall go on my travels again."

"No, uncle, you won't; you will have two people to love you instead of one, and you always say Gilbert suits you."

"Little one, Uncle William is content if his precious jewel is happy." He held out his arms to her, and she crept into them as she had done when a child; he kept her fast a long while, for she had suffered the few tears to grow to a shower, and he would have them shed nowhere else than on his breast. When she was calm again, he kissed her fondly, and bade her go dream and be happy.

"After all," was his reflection when she was gone, "it is hard to train up a nice, warm-hearted thing to be the comfort of your life, and just when you have learnt that you can't do without her, to find some audacious person putting in a claim for what he has not a shadow of right to. Well, I suppose I must submit."

XXXIX.

If you have ever watched the day brightening over distant hills, you will first have seen a yellow reflected radiance, dim, uncertain, before whose slow advance the gray shadows of night retreat reluctantly; soon those very clouds and shadows take a tint of violet, of rose, of orange, from the dawning sun; on the ridge of wold a line of light rests, then melts down to the lower fields, sparkles on the down-leaping torrent of some hill-stream, gleams on a church spire, then on low thatched roofs.

Gradually it spreads and glows, the heavenly blue shines out, night and mist and cloud are gone; as the day advances there is no great visible change, only the air grows warmer, softer, more balmy; there is a wealth and lustre of life in trees and flowers, which draw their beauty from the sun; a very luxury of being in the drowsy summer flush of heat.

It is high noon—the climax of day. You rest now—you say "This is enough: let the hours linger, we will abide still." Yet the noon stays not for that; you must rise and go forward: life and nature never pause.

XL.

Thus it was with Gilbert Massenger: it was high noon in his life; fain would he have lingered, but the word came, "Stay not; go on your way."

Barely four months had elapsed since Helen and he had exchanged their promise, when, returning one evening to his lodgings in the rude little town to which his work confined him, he found two letters lying on his table, which the post had brought during the morning. One was from Helen—a long epistle, cheerful and kind, like herself. He seized this first, and read it thrice before glancing at the other—a large, ill-folded affair on coarse paper, roughly, almost illegibly directed. The exterior of this document

was not attractive enough to put Helen's out of his thoughts: he even sat down and replied to hers at great length, and carried his own letter to the post before opening the other. He lost two hours at least; but finally he broke the seal, expecting to see a petition or placard of some kind. Instead, it was a letter from Mittie, undated, and written in haste and difficulty; for the old servant was but a poor scribe.

"You must come home directly you get this, Gilbert," she wrote; "my mistress was taken worse last night, and has never given over calling for you. She is not quite herself now, but she wills to see you very bad, as if she had something on her mind. I got your address from the old Doctor's brother; he is over at Langhope with his niece. Miss Gertrude heard say you were to marry her, and that gave her quite a sort of shock. 'Oh, he'll never have the heart to do that!' she said to me when she came home—'he'll never surely have the heart to do that! Mittie, reach my desk'—but while I was getting it for her, she fell down with a great groan, holding her hand against her side,

and never spoke after but to say, 'Gilbert! bring Gilbert!—will nobody tell Gilbert?' and so she is going on now, but fainter. You must come at once, for she won't be long for this world, and she can't die happy without you. You will not let her having turned you away before keep you back now, Gilbert: you 'll come—I have told her you 'll come."

This was the substance of what with difficulty the young man deciphered amidst a haze of tautology, singular caligraphy, and still more singular spelling and grammar. He thrust it into his pocket, and went out immediately to make arrangements for an absence of ten days or a fortnight. He acted in a sort of hurry and confusion unusual with him: spasmodically, as if moved by springs which he must obey without effort of will or aid of reflection. He was dizzied as by a violent blow, which has stunned sense without paralysing the active functions of life. He started that night by coach, and reached Ashton-le-Forde the day but one after, about noon.

XLI.

He got down in the market-place, and walked swiftly up Lowgate. It was a broad, sunshiny day, very clear, and warm, and quiet. He knocked at Miss Massenger's door without looking at the house; Mittie came to open it herself. "Oh! Gilbert, you are too late!" said she, crying; "Miss Gertrude died last night."

"I made the best haste I could, Mittie," was all his reply; and he followed her into the old parlour, whence the light was excluded almost entirely. He could see nothing, having come in from the glaring daylight; besides, he was faint, for he had neither eaten nor slept since he started on his journey, and his head swam. He sat down on the first chair he reached. "Not that—it was my poor mistress's!" cried Mittie, hastily.

"I will go up to my own room," said he; and passing out again into the passage, he staggered up the stairs. The old servant watched him—"And he's ill too," thought she.

Gilbert shut himself up, and endeavoured to recollect the hurried events of the last three days—in vain. "I cannot reflect yet," said he; "I must first know all." He went down again; Mittie met him, commiseration and sorrow in her homely face.

"I doubt you're not well, Gilbert; you've been hurried and vexed with what I wrote," she remarked.

"Yes, Mittie. Bring me something to eat. I have not tasted for thirty hours; I am sickening from inanition. I'll talk to you afterwards."

She obeyed him in haste, and having set food on the table, went out and left him alone. Soon his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light. Glancing round the parlour, he saw that its arrangements were the same in every particular as formerly: opposite the fire-place hung the portrait of the handsome mad-woman; on the bookshelves stood the well-read volumes in their old places; his aunt's desk and work-basket had not been removed; but her large Bible was thickly covered with dust—the only visible token of her absence. After half-an-hour he summoned Mittie;

he was now calm and collected; he had nerved up his mind to what he had to do.

"Bless me, how like to Miss Gertrude you do grow, Gilbert!" was the old servant's exclamation, when she came in and saw him again. "Where is she laid, Mittie?" asked he, deliberately.

"In her old room—she always kept to it."

"I should like to see her."

Mittie led the way up-stairs: in going, Gilbert glanced at the old clock to see the hour; it had run down, and stood at twelve.

"I have never wound up that clock, though I have lived here a matter of forty years," said Mittie, who observed him. "Old master always did it as long as he lived; and then, Miss Gertrude: I can't remember that she ever missed it but once, and that was the day after you went away, eight years ago."

"Yes; it scarce seems half so long; but time flies faster the less one has left of it."

They were at the door of the room. Mittie turned the key in the lock, and entered first. The curtains were closed over the windows, but

the sun shining in through the crimson stuff, cast a warm glow over all; even over the bed, where the rigid outline of a figure was traced beneath the sheet. The servant reverently folded it back from the face, saying, "She looks more like what I mind of her as a young girl than ever she did when you saw her, Gilbert."

It was true; he scarcely recognized her. Her gloomy brow was unbent: death had smoothed out the furrows of pride and grief; even her mouth seemed less stern and compressed: the features, worn as they were, looked handsome still, and the reflected hue of red took from their mortal pallor.

"Yes;" Mittie went on—half to Gilbert, and half, as if running over old recollections in her memory—"yes; she was called the rose of Ashton, and a fairer there was not, far or near. She was courted by gentle and simple; for old Andrew had money: but William Grahame loved her for herself, and he won her."

"Who did you say?" suddenly demanded Gilbert.

"William Grahame, the Doctor's brother at the Grammar-school. A handsome pair they were; and it was settled when they were to marry, and all about it. But who knows what is to come between? One night she came home early from a New Year's party. I found her sitting in that old high-backed chair by the fire, looking all ice and iron-like. I went up to her, but she put me off with her hand in this way, and said, 'Mittie, don't speak to me.' She had her odd starts of temper at times, but I had never seen her like that: she frightened me. By and by up she got, and began to tear off her white dress, and to pull the ornaments out of her hair. I picked them up as she threw them on the floor, but I didn't dare speak, for, though she was kind at heart, I never cared to come across her strange moods. When she was nearly undressed, she came past the glass and caught a sight of her face. Oh! but she was beautiful, then—and she flung up her arms over her head, crying out, 'Oh, God! spare me!' She said it two or three times: she was quite out of herself, you know. After a bit she went on and

finished undressing, then knelt down by that chair. I can see her yet, Gilbert. She stayed on her knees, shivering, for an hour; but at last she got into bed: she turned her face to the wall, and then she began to cry and sob. Oh, it was pitiful to hear and see. I tried to comfort her my best, but nothing would do; she only said, 'My heart will break: I wish I had never been born!'

"I stayed by her all night; but she never slept. She wailed and tossed till morning broke, and then she would be up. She was at her prayers again for another hour; but when she rose off her knees she was quietened. Her father went down out of his room soon after, and she followed him. They were shut up in the parlour together for a long while; but at last old master went out to his office, and she came back, up-stairs. I hardly knew her: she looked all frozen and twisted. I had kept the fire in, and down she sat on the hearth-rug, and hid her face on her knees, crying again as bad as ever. Presently she looked up, and said, 'Mittie, do you know that my father has two brothers who are mad?' I said, I had

heard of it. She did not speak again, except to tell me to fetch her writing-box, which I did; and then I left her. Presently she rang for me to carry a letter to the Doctor's, where William Grahame stayed when he was in Ashton. He came up about ten minutes after, and asked to see Miss Gertrude; but she would not go down to him at all: she would not see him. I don't know that she ever did see him again; for after he had had a deal of talk with her father, he went away, and left the town that night. She heard the street-door shut with a clash when he went out; and down she dashed herself on the floor and lay with her face in her hands hours after. Oh! but she suffered! Nobody saw it but me; but it was awful. And this was how it was: she would not marry because she thought it wicked, and a tempting of God, seeing that so many of her forebears had been mad: she said they were an accursed race. Yet, if ever woman loved man—if ever a woman's heart was bound up with another's—hers was with William Grahame. Look at her! you would n't say from her face she had gone through so much."

Gilbert did look at her: every line of the still countenance was softened and glorified to his eyes by her old servant's narrative. He experienced a keen remorse for having ever grieved her.

"After William Grahame went abroad," Mittie went on, after a brief silence, "she began to go out again; for before she would never pass the door-stone: but she was quite changed: she had lost her beauty, and her temper grew cold. She mortified herself in every way, and went a deal amongst the poor; but they did not like her: she was too hard—you knew her so, Gilbert. Two years after, she had another great trial: your father brought home a pretty, delicate wife. She had tried to engage him not to marry, but he never would promise. The night you were born she came up to my room and said, 'Mittie, there is another generation of sorrow come into the world.' Then your mother died. Don't think hardly of your aunt, Gilbert; but her nightly prayer was that God would take you too: but it was not so ordained."

"Towards the end, Mittie, did she charge you with any message to me?"

"No; she never spoke to be understood, after those words I told you in the letter. She grew weaker and weaker till she died; but I do think your name was the last word on her lips, and the last thought in her mind."

Gilbert stood a few seconds longer, gazing thoughtfully on the rigid face, and then turned away. Mittie, before drawing the sheet over it, laid her rough hand tenderly on the clay-cold brow. "There was a vast of good in her," she said: "she always intended to do right. I wish we may be as fit to die, when our day comes, as she was." Then they both went out from the room.

XLII.

Instead of returning to the parlour, Gilbert went into the garden at the back of the house, and paced the narrow, weed-grown walks till nearly sunset. His brain was in a whirl; he was driven

hither and thither by a persecuting host of conflicting thoughts: his way was not plain before him; he could not see yet what it was right for him to do. Helen was within reach; she was at Langhope, but he must not go to her: one thing seemed sure — he must not see her again.

Where had his conscience been, that it had suffered passion to drift him within sight of a haven only to drag him back ruthlessly into the storm-heaved water? Where had memory hidden that now vividly remembered warning of his aunt?—"It is wrong to perpetuate this awful curse; it is cruel, it is wicked to give such a burdened existence to sentient beings: it is miserable selfishness to hand down to innocent children such an inheritance of utter wretchedness."

What did his acknowledgment of the justice of this dictum involve? Separation from Helen—final, irrevocable separation—separation for ever! With his own hand must he turn away the pleasant stream of her love; with his own hand cast down the fabric of his happiness. His must

be the will to decide, and the strength to act. He had no friend, no helper, no comforter. He was utterly alone: turn where he would, all was blank, soundless solitude. He could not make that bitter sacrifice, whose completeness he approved, of none effect: he must act it over again in his own person; but how? There was despair in the very thought: yet the inevitable *must* stood up before him indomitable. He sat down on the decaying trunk of a great tree, which had been struck with lightning when he was a boy, and strove to bring the matter in all its bearings before his moral vision. Then a fine, a subtle strain of temptation breathed softly into his ear: he could not but hearken.

"What good men do daily cannot be so deeply wrong," it said; "people of pious ways of thinking see no unavoidable bar to marriage in hereditary madness. They do as their fathers did, and leave the doom to their children and children's children, without convicting—nay, even without *suspecting*—themselves of any crime. The misery is so widely spread, so uncertain in its manifestations, that

none feel bound by it: sometimes it passes by an entire generation. Besides, what is one item more or less in the great, festering plague-spot of humanity? Why should *you* alone be a sacrifice? Will one in a thousand—will one in ten thousand, think your example worthy of imitation? Feel your own strength—it is sound in every organ; consult your own brain—it is clear, shrewd, vivid. Why should you be stricken, or your children after you? Trust to Providence, and take Helen: the taint of your race may be worn out."

"But it is not trusting in Providence to override Nature's fundamental laws; it is tempting it," was the utterance of another voice that spoke with the sound of a trumpet: "out of evil can no good come. You *must*, you *shall* work out what she, who now lies dead in the house, began. Think," it went on with a tone of softer warning, "think if it be possible for you ever again to forget the story you have heard to-day beside that corpse. It is *not* possible: it will follow you always. Would you tie a pure young life to your hampered fate? That phantom, dimly seen at intervals

before, is now a gaunt and ghastly skeleton—a real thing: an untiring persecutor. You may conceal it from strangers, but could you hide it from *her?* No; her love would penetrate your miserable secret soon. Think how she would suffer! *Alone* you may be brave and dare it; with her bound to you, you would not *dare*, but dread it. It would follow you through crowded haunts of men, close as your shadow at your heels: at a feast it would pledge you silently, and dash the cup with poison; at night it would peer mockingly through the curtains, and defy you to rest; over your children's cradles it would hang darkling like an impending fate."

"What a girl resisted and endured, shall I turn from, coward-like?" he asked himself: but the strong cry of his heart was ever "Helen! Helen!"

Utterly broken and subdued, he wandered back to the house. It was almost dark in the parlour, and Mittie was carrying in tea, with the lighted candles; she asked him two or three questions, but so pre-occupied was he that he neither heard nor answered. Being again left alone, he sank

into a chair, and for a while remained with his face buried in his arms; presently he rose with a heavy groan, fetched his aunt's desk, and proceeded to an examination of her papers, hoping to find some explicit record of the facts detailed by Mittie: perhaps to discover something which might mitigate their force.

All was in exact order; for her habits were methodical. His search, however, promised to be useless, and he was just on the point of abandoning it, when he perceived that there was a drawer formed in the thickness of the desk; on pressing a spring this started open; within lay a thin packet of letters tied together with a faded ribbon, and several loose sheets of paper closely covered with a small delicate writing. He hesitated some minutes before touching any of these, but at length he slowly opened the letters. They were in a large, bold hand, and bore the signature of William Grahame, as he expected. He glanced at them cursorily: these old love-letters, yellow, faded, were all written in happy times; there was not one after Gertrude Massenger formed her singular

resolve; consequently no explanation of it. He took up the topmost of the loose leaves, which proved to be part of a diary; it bore a recent date, and therefore he sought lower down, and found a few sheets almost illegible from the paleness of the writing. These began as far back as her engagement to William Grahame; indeed, that was the first event recorded, and the diary seemed to have been commenced as an outlet for the sensations of exuberant happiness it caused her. Soon the entries became more sparse and brief; the last was made on New Year's Eve, before, as it stated, going to her last party previous to her marriage. The rest of the page was blank.

The next bore date upwards of two years later, and referred to her brother Ralph; who, it appeared, had come home with his bride. It was angry and bitter: it spoke of a wasted sacrifice, and anticipated evils, dark and fatal. Three lines mentioned the birth of a son to her brother; the same number stated the death of his wife. No comment was attached to either. Half a dozen pregnant words recorded the removal of Ralph to

the *same place as the others*, later in the same year. Then, again, a blank half-sheet. The one which followed it commenced thus:—

"I went this morning to the Retreat to see Ralph; it is the first time I have been able to nerve myself up to the task, and when I got to the gate I felt coward enough to wish to turn back, without performing it: but I forced myself to go through with it. The doctor told me it was one of his best days, and that I had timed my coming fortunately, as perhaps he might know me, which would not have been the case the day before. As we walked along the passages to his room, I tried to harden myself so as not to betray emotion:—Oh, my God, what a miserable spectacle! The helpless, sickening fatuity of his countenance revolted me! His leer, his rolling eyes, his gestures made my very heart turn. Raving, fierce insanity may have so much of the terrible as to awe—but this sight! never while I live will it be absent from me.

"And if I had been weak—if I had listened to the suggestions of my heart—I might have married William Grahame, and borne him children to be-

come objects like that—objects of loathing and fear, even to those who should love them. I thank my God earnestly for the strength He gave me in that hour of trial! Every day now I shall look more fearfully than ever in Gilbert's face to watch the growth of reason. I will strive to imbue him with the spirit of self-denial, that he may finish what I have begun, and that the curse of our family may cease from the earth."

Gilbert hid his face from the light—it was of his father that page spoke! The same diseased blood ran in his veins: the same torpor of intellect might fall on him! Oh! miserable, ghastly possibility!

"It *shall* cease from the earth," he cried aloud: "I swear it!" As the words broke from his lips a chill fell upon him: he shook in every limb. The soul of Jephtha, when he saw the full consequence of his rash vow, could not have supported a keener agony. The words divided him from Helen, as effectually as if Death stood between them: he would never go back from his oath. What now remained for him to do was to fulfil it.

XLIII.

It was a night of dull, vain suffering: he let its torrent pour over him, and stirred not. He put forth no hand to seek guidance at that of God; he lifted no prayer for strength or patience. Though pain writhed serpent-like amongst his nerves, he uttered no complaint: his was the mute passiveness of the Indian at the stake. Endure the agony he must; therefore he endures it and is still. His very extremity compelled him to fortitude: for men of high physical courage rarely rebel against the Inevitable.

When he left his room the next morning he found a letter lying on the breakfast table; he did not take it at once—he would prove himself—for it was from Helen. He tried to imagine the kind, comforting things she would have written to him; then suddenly tore it open and began to read. How loving and tender it was—and, oh! how it stabbed him! What treason had he worked

against her happiness, sweet, trusting thing! Every gentle word drove the sword deeper into his heart, and made his task harder.

"Come to us at Langhope, when all is over," she wrote: "everybody here loves you. Uncle William is not well, or you would have his company now. Dear Gilbert, I will walk to meet you over the Moor on Thursday: you will be better with us for a few days than at Ashton;" and so on through three long pages of idle, yet most precious trivialities.

That letter calmed him somewhat: its tone was so quiet, yet so pleasant—like the caress of a cool, gentle hand on a brow burning with fever. It rebuked his passion even while it suggested fresh incentives to it. But oh! how dear it made the love which he had to reject and put away!

XLIV.

The rain fell heavily during the morning of Miss Gertrude Massenger's funeral. Gilbert, her

physician, and her solicitor, were the only persons, besides Mittie, who followed her to the grave. A knot of old men and women, sheltered under the porch, looked on, testifying a late respect and gratitude for her memory: they, at least, would miss her bountiful hand, and might well afford a few tears for what they had lost. Mittie went amongst them and distributed her mistress's last dole—a munificent one it was, for there were not many to share it.

"There are few who will regret me, except for the alms they will miss," the giver had, in a moment of keen disappointment, said to her faithful servant; "but take this money, Mittie, and as many of my old pensioners as come to my funeral may divide it: they will at least *show* a decent sorrow; and, perhaps, that is all I have purchased."

The old folks tottered home in the rain, almost forgetting the giver in the gift, to spread discontent amongst neighbours who, having thought the spring dry, had not cared to make lament over it: her last act certainly earned less thanks than abuse. Perhaps it was an unfair test: per-

haps those who stayed away were no more self-seekers than those who went; but discussion was vain: the thing was done, and could not be undone.

Mr. Lawton, the solicitor, accompanied Gilbert Massenger back to the house in Lowgate. The blinds had been drawn up, the windows opened. The presence of Death having departed, Life might move about there again without stealthy footstep; and the rain ceasing, a gleam of watery sunshine played up and down the ancient staircase where the coffin had been carried down a few hours before.

The solicitor was not a man of many words; and it was well, for Gilbert Massenger was in no mood to listen to stereotyped condolences.

"Sir, you may not be aware that Miss Massenger died intestate?" said he.

"Indeed!"

"Such is the fact. I have drawn up two wills for her—the one as much as ten years back, which she completed at the time; but she afterwards burnt that in my presence, and gave me instruc-

tions for another—this, about the space of two years ago. She bade me keep the draft of it by me ready for her signature; but I never could prevail upon her to put her name to it. There was an indecision in her movements on this matter which I was at a loss to understand."

"Whatever are the provisions of the last incomplete will, they may be carried out."

"You, being heir-at-law, can do as you choose; all her property she bequeathed to you, charged only with an annuity to her female servant. Her affairs are in perfect order, and there being no relative left except yourself, dispute there can be none."

"Sir, I will communicate with you presently—not before I leave Ashton, for my departure is hurried; but by letter. In the mean time pay what is owing in the town, and let Mittie have the amount of her first half-year's annuity, in her mistress's name."

Gilbert spoke slowly and calmly: he guarded his manner, that it might betray no emotion; and Mr. Lawton being gone, he summoned Mittie.

The poor old servant was crying bitterly, and what he had to say was not of a nature to calm her. He told her she might remain in the house, which he should not let, and keep it as his aunt had left it. "At some distant day I may return, Mittie, but it will not be yet," said he; "when you need money, apply to me through Mr. Lawton: your mistress provided for you."

"Oh, Gilbert, it is not the money I care for!" gasped Mittie.

"I know that: my aunt has at least one sincere mourner," was his quiet reply.

"Ay, that she has; and one that will mourn for her to the last day of her life!" cried she between her sobs.

"Go now, my good Mittie, I wish to be alone," said Gilbert. And the faithful old servant retired to her kitchen, to count over the thousand kindnesses she had received from her who was gone, and to bemoan her loss, which nothing could ever make up; for they had been together from their youth.

XLV.

William Grahame, from his room at Langhope, saw Helen cross the park early in the afternoon of this day. He knew her object, for she had told him, and his lips unconsciously murmured, as he watched her retreating figure, "God protect her! God shield her!" for there was a presentiment upon him. Since the rain, the day had turned out bright and sultry; there was not a cloud in the sky. All along, as she went, Helen heard the summer song of birds in the trees and hedge-rows; her heart was brimming with tender thoughts; she walked fast that she might meet Gilbert the sooner, and speak to him kindly and consolingly.

There were more paths than one across the moor from Ashton, but having settled that he would certainly take the most direct, she started along it, and went upwards of three miles. She would not accuse him of tardiness, for she knew not what he might have had to do; but soon her feet began to

lag, and coming to a large stone with a thorn-bush near to shelter her from the sun, she sat down to rest. She had Gilbert's last letter in her bosom, and she drew it forth to beguile the time; ever and anon she lifted her eyes, shading them with her hand, to look eagerly along the road: once, twice—nay, half-a-score times, had she traced the familiar lines, but no one appeared.

She would go a little further—another mile.

The fatigue, heat, and anxiety began to tell upon her strength; she sat down again to rest: this time, with her elbow on her knee, and her head supported on her hand, she kept her gaze patiently fixed on the furthest point of the road, where it was lost in a flood of sunshine.

One hour passed; two hours. The brightness of the afternoon began to wane.

A little further—just a little further; they should but meet the sooner, and she would not feel tired in returning. Thus by degrees was she drawn on, hope still panting livingly in her heart.

Once she saw a figure emerging from the sunny haze; she hastened her steps; she almost ran. It

was he—no—was it? The figure was shorter; it came sauntering idly on—not as Gilbert would come: it was a stranger, who eyed her curiously and passed forward, surprised to see a solitary girl in that wild, unprotected place.

Distantly her ear caught the hours as they struck on the clock at Langhope Gate; it was time to return: her uncle William would be anxious.

Only another half hour, and then if he did not appear, she would go back. The half hour passed, and another to it; yet Helen stayed waiting till the sun was almost level with the horizon. Sick and faint, at last she began to retrace her weary way; looking back every few minutes; pausing often to listen for the echo of a step, which might have been heard afar off in the hush of the summer evening. Then hope suggested that he might have come by the high-road; might even now be waiting for her at the Tower, or perhaps coming to meet her: every possibility but the real one crossed her mind. She was quite worn out when she re-entered her uncle's presence.

"Disappointed, Helen?" said he, taking her hand and looking wistfully in her face.

"Then he has not come?"

"No. But cheer up; to-morrow we will go over to Ashton and see after him."

XLVI.

At the time poor Helen was devouring her feverish anxiety on Langhope Moor, Gilbert Massenger was alone in the dismal parlour of the old house in Lowgate, writing the sentence which was to separate them for ever. Every now and then he paused: some pleasantly-remembered tone of her voice—some sweet aspect of her face—came up betwixt him and the paper, dimming it from his sight. Every thought was a temptation; every line accomplished the trophy of a self-gained victory. The letter was ended at last, sealed up, posted. His fate was no longer in his own hand: he felt like a man restrained from the use of deadly weapons when death seems to him the last boon

and best of all: he has no longer the means of death, therefore he lies low in his despair, and ceases to fret against his burthen of life.

William Grahame received this document—for to him it was that Gilbert had addressed himself—with other letters, the next morning. They were all at breakfast, and it was some time before he found himself alone. The moment he did so, he opened and read the letter. "The old story over again," murmured he to himself; and after a few moments of reflection, he went in search of Helen. He found her with Mrs. Forester in the conservatory, but her inquiring glance flew instantly to him. She understood the trouble in his face, in part, and going to him, asked softly if anything had happened to grieve him.

"I want to talk to you, Helen; let us walk up into the plantations," said he. And after the exchange of a few sentences with their hostess, the two went out together.

They struck deep into the wood, but on reaching a rustic seat they stayed. Before them stretched a little sunny glade, with a runnel of water at its

foot; the hush and stillness, except for its silvery tinkle, was profound.

"Let us rest here, Helen," said her uncle, and they sat down. "I want to speak to you about myself, and circumstances that occurred before you were born," he went on: "yes, very many years ago; but whose influence has not ceased to this day."

Helen glanced anxiously up in his face, for his voice was low and troubled; but she did not interrupt: intuitively she felt that herself was touched by the influence he spoke of.

"Brother Tom and I were both born in Ashton-le-Forde, and though education carried us away from it for many years, still we were young men when we returned to it—he to settle, and I to remain with him for a short period. I possessed a small but sufficient competence, and was not absolutely under the necessity of following any profession, though I had been brought up to the law. There was an old attorney in the town then, who possessed a very handsome daughter; all admired her, but I loved her, and she preferred me. We were en-

gaged to be married: even the day was fixed. You would have thought happiness assured then, Helen; but it was not so. The difficulty arose whence it was expected least—from Gertrude herself. She refused to fulfil her promise, on the ground that there was hereditary insanity in her family: she had been kept in ignorance of the fact up to the moment of its accidental discovery. I was aware of it all along, and I thought her scruples cruelly overstretched; but she allowed me no opportunity of pleading against them: she sent me my sentence of banishment, and refused ever to see me again. I do not deny that I was indignant and embittered. I left Ashton in haste and anger, to return to it no more for nearly thirty years. I heard of her living a life of seclusion, devoted to works of charity. She had a nephew whom she brought up, and with whom at length she quarrelled; this nephew, in the course of time, crossed my path; I encouraged his intimacy—I liked him."

"Uncle, is it Gilbert Massenger?"

"Yes, Helen: it is. Do you understand whither my story tends?"

"I think I do."

"He has written me a fine, spirited, manly, sorrowful letter."

"May I read it, Uncle William?"

"Surely, my darling;" and taking out the letter he gave it into her hand. She opened it slowly, and spread it on her knee: the old man watched her; saw her lip quiver slightly, then a great thundrous tear-drop splashed down upon the paper. When she had read it to the end, she looked up: "May I write to him?—write to tell him that I think his act just, and that I love him better for it?" said she, in a tremulous tone.

William Grahame seemed dubious. "Why write, Helen?" asked he.

She did not immediately reply; at last she said, "I feel that he is so lonely and hopeless: he says so. I want to cheer him."

"Will it not prolong his pain?"

"It would not mine."

"Then follow the guiding of thy own kind heart, Helen; it cannot lead thee wrong."

The permission appeared to soothe her, and

they strayed back to the house. On the way they encountered Mr. Forester. "Ah!" cried that gentleman, "Langhope breezes have not brought back your roses yet, Helen: you look quite wan this morning."

She could not coax a smile to the lips that answered him: her heart was very sore.

XLVII.

Gilbert Massenger set out on his return to Wales by the night coach on the day of the funeral. On entering his lodgings the first object that met his view was Helen's letter; the sight of it was like a sudden tearing away of the dressings from an agonizing wound. He had spent three days on the road, and in that space had striven to obtain a certain fortitude: now the work was all undone again. So keen was his pain, that for a time he did not dare touch the letter; but at length he took it up and eagerly read it. It was gentle and tender: it intended to drop the heavenly balm

of healing; instead, each expression of fondness and endearment was as a flake of fire falling on his naked wound. He writhed in his suffering almost like a man beside himself. How the next few weeks passed over his head it were vain to record: the alternations between the frenzy of torture and the calm of despair were frequent and rapid. His victory over himself was a ruinous one: its exhausting results were not to be counted in a brief space—they were life-lasting.

It was gorgeous summer weather; the wild little Welsh village where he lived was built amongst the heathery knolls of a barren moor; mountain lines and peaks were softly defined in purple against a broken sky of flying clouds, whose passing shadows on the hill sides were fantastic and irregular as the march of a phantom army.

Near at hand enterprise was at work, but from its early steps all but the workers kept aloof. It was a solitude for Gilbert. For weeks he exchanged no word of fellowship with any: his pain was unassuaged. Day by day he went amongst the labourers, directing their energies with the

quick eye of a shrewd master; he went through the multiplied cares of his office with mechanical ease and exactitude; but where was the satisfaction he had had hitherto in the performance of them? Why did he toil on? What profit was there to earn? what guerdon? None. The coveted apples of worldly distinction were become tasteless as ashes or sawdust to his lips. There seemed to be but one gain, and that to lay down and be forgotten amongst the rude, unmarked graves of the hill-side churchyard. He nourished but one wish —the wish of Job in his extremity: "Oh! that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand and cut me off. What is my strength that I should hope? and what is mine end that I should prolong my life? O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good."

One sabbath evening he strolled away up the wilder part of the hills; the path he chose was the dry bed of a torrent, which in winter poured down a full, rapid stream. Stones cumbered the way; the purple-black heather grew down to its brink. Here was perfect stillness—perfect solitude; per-

haps the foot of man did not wake its startled echoes once a year. Below he heard the faint tinkle of a bell—the church bell; but no murmur of human life ascended so high: the shrill cry of a bird sometimes broke the hush, without lessening its loneliness, and that was all. He had the silent hills to himself. No pleasant thoughts—meet companions for such a place—talked with him by the way: the oft-repeated cry of his soul was, "What good shall my life do me?"

It was not present pain only; though that was most bitter: he must look forward to no period, however distant and hard to reach, for satisfaction. Perhaps the day that was passing might be of his best days; behind was that grisly shade: he could hear its tramp advancing. Who knew when it might overtake him? Death, indeed, were better than life, with that for his yoke-fellow. Mounting higher, he came to a steep ledge of rock; down this in the winter season the water must have fallen in a cascade, but now it was almost dry; with difficulty he ascended the cliff, and found that at the top was a little mountain tarn, set like a dark gem in

its brow. Its edge was clustered about with stones grown over with many-tinted mosses; its clear, tranquil depths mirrored distinctly the changeful sky of evening. For a little while he stood beside the lake; his back was to the west, his shadow fell long across the water: it seemed to beckon to him, to waver to and fro, to spread forth its arms to embrace him.

All at once through the silence broke the humming murmur of many voices; then paused, and one tone sounded forth clear and full, "Thou shalt do no murder;" again the low response.

Gilbert started away as if God himself had spoken out of heaven. He perceived a track through the heather no wider than a sheep-track, which came to one side of the tarn, as if it were their drinking-place; he followed this, thinking to escape to deeper solitude, but instead he came suddenly in sight of a throng of people gathered round one of those wandering preachers then so common in country districts. They were just beginning to sing a hymn, to a wild, rejoicing tune; the hill-echoes answered it back, and distance

softened the rude melody to a touching sweetness. Gilbert listened: he was impressed by the scene, and no longer anxious for flight. Such religion appeals to the heart, not to the head. His errors had arisen partly from trying with his finite reason to go beyond God's revelation: baffled there, he sank into unbelief. It was as if an invisible hand had led him, whether he would or no, within reach of the one good which was all that life had left for him.

The hymn having ceased, the man prayed, and then began to preach. Slowly Gilbert drew within hearing, but kept rather aloof from the multitude. The speaker was such a figure as in the troublous days of the Scottish Covenant might have appeared amongst a secret congregation, to speak peace to their tried souls. He was a man of fifty, or thereabouts, with grizzled hair, and a strong-featured earnest countenance. His hearers felt that this was for him not mere hired service: he spoke out from his own heart to theirs, and he was heard with the breathless interest which only intense earnestness can win. His eloquence was fervid,

but uncultivated: his similes were drawn from the rude aspects of nature spread around him, and were such as the coarsest understanding could receive.

"Behold!" cried he, with hand uplifted to the blazing sky, "the Lord Jesus is as a shadow from the heat—he is a rain-cloud in long drought. Are you athirst?—he has the wine of eternal life! Are you sore smitten, bruised, wounded unto death?—he has the balm of healing: he is the Physician who gives the universal specific without money and without price. Are you heavily burthened with the cares and sorrows of this life?—look up: high above the world towers the cross; cast down your load there; sit and rest: none will gainsay you—none will bid you move on.

"You toil and trouble through your little day, each of you intent on his little gains; you ache with pain, you moan with grief; you try to find comfort after your own devices; you go to the polluted streams that trickle amongst the habitations of men to quench your thirst, and you drain a loathsome poison: why not turn to

the fountain-head at once, where the waters of consolation flow fresh from the Rock of Ages? He that drinks there shall thirst no more. If afflictions come—and come they must—he cries, 'The Lord is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble!' If enemies environ him he says, 'Who shall make me afraid?—my trust is in God!' When his steps draw nigh to the waters of death, he looks across their darkness to the hills beyond, and his words are, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.' Yes, he *shall* see God. He knows in whom he has trusted; his hope is sure and steadfast. No broken reed, no rotten prop, but a great and mighty rock.

"There are men who, instead of looking to Him, begin to say, 'Were ever any so sorely bestead as we?' They will try to fight their own battle with their own broken weapons, and they earn to themselves lamentable defeat.

"'Thou art the man!' Your conscience is crying to you now, 'Thou art the man.'" The

preacher paused. and stretched out his hand with lifted finger: it seemed to Gilbert he pointed specially to him; he paused an instant, then went on with a subdued yet earnest thrill in his tone, as if his whole soul breathed in it. "Brethren, in this world I shall meet you no more. I go forth in the strength of the Lord on my mission to heathen lands. Shall I see you again in the courts of the house of our God? Shall I be able to say, 'Of those whom Thou hast given me have I lost none'? Or shall I be as a shepherd whose flock has gone astray and fallen into the jaws of the lion?"

There was the sound of sobbing amongst the women, and a silence for the space of several minutes ensued; then all the assembly sank down low on their knees, and their minister offered up a parting prayer; after which the people slowly dispersed.

At a few hundred paces below the spot where this scene was enacted, was a little hamlet of rude stone cottages. Gilbert had turned the shoulder of the mountain, and come to a part of the district unknown to him; he therefore proceeded to retrace

his steps by the sheep-track and the bed of the stream. The sun was now going down, and all the west was flooded with crimson; the tarn, as he repassed it, was of an ensanguined hue with the reflected splendour. The more distant hill-masses lay dusk in shadow, and over the sea, visible from that elevation, rose the pale crescent moon, companioned by a solitary star.

He looked up thoughtfully; the excessive gloom had gone from his countenance, and the awful depression from his mind. The clouds were lifted, but by what hand he could not tell; the paralysis of healthy feeling was removed: he could think of something else besides his own dreary fate. Insensibly his eye took pleasure in the gorgeous aspect of the scenery spread out below him: he sat down and watched the sky change from its regal tints of fire and purple to a hazy gray; it was twilight in the valley, while day still lingered with him. A religious calm crept over his spirit: not hope, nor yet even resignation, but only quiet. There was an impression upon him as of a power overruling his wild, rebel-

lious thoughts: as if God had laid His finger upon him, and said, "Peace: be still!" and the storm ceased. Instead of the wrack of tempest, there came the lull of a dead calm. As evening advanced, a wind got up, and careered boisterously over the hills. Gilbert listened awhile to its many voices, and then pursued his way homewards. Arrived there, he supped; and then, after a little hesitation and questioning with himself, he sought out the old Bible given to him by Mr. Leigh.

"Let me try this highly recommended panacea," said he internally: "there must be in it more than I have yet found. Strange, if it be so valuable, that few men try it until they have a disgust against the world, and are weary of their lives! I believe Helen loved it." So he sat down by his uncurtained window to read.

Every night afterwards he sought through its pages, and presently his time became less weary; his future less dark. Beyond its mists and clouds he began to see, as in a glass, the glimmer of another existence, where there is rest and peace for evermore: he saw that God, though just, is merciful,

long-suffering, and kind; that He wills not that *any* should perish. Conviction stole upon him unawares. Weak in faith he was; but he prayed with earnestness, "Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief!"

XLVIII.

The summer wore slowly away, the nights grew long, the days chill and drear. Wild storms beat the sea; equinoctial gales tore fiercely over the mountains. With the desolation in nature crept back the pain to Gilbert's heart; it dealt hardly with him: it snatched sleep and appetite away; it suffered him no moment of ease from its relentless aching. For a little while he strove against it, but it was not to be exorcised thus: then he determined to have a total change of life. He would quit all that reminded him of troubles past: perhaps, in time, he might also distance that other grim shadow, which dogged him unremittingly.

He left Wales early in December, and went up to London. There was a craving necessity upon him

to see Helen once more: not to speak to her; but to feast his eyes again with the sight of her beauty.

One afternoon about dusk, he came stealthily to the garden-gate at Norwood. William Grahame had not returned from the city, he knew; because the curtains were not drawn over the window of the parlour, and the ruddy glow of a bright fire shone through the glass upon the little lawn.

Helen was there: he could see the outline of her figure, half stooping over a book which she read by the light of the flame: so intent did she seem, he thought he might draw nearer, unobserved. Noiselessly he passed under the shadow of the evergreens to the further side of the window, and breathless as a spy who risks his life every moment he stays, he peered greedily at the unconscious girl. Here he could discern her features; they were calm, and her expression cheerful; now and then a smile flashed over her lips: she was amused with what she read. She had recovered peace: there was no trace of wearing anguish in her sweet face. It comforted him strangely: if she had looked sad and ill, he would

have been tortured with a remorseful sorrow for what he had done.

Presently she rose, walked about the room and began to sing to herself. Soft and low the strain was, but not melancholy: he could, drawn back amongst the bushes, hear every word in her clear intonation. By and by she paused on the hearth, and stood looking down into the fire, with her back to the window: after a few minutes' silence, she began to croon that sweet Scotch ballad—

"My heart is sair, I darena tell,
My heart is sair for somebody;
I could wake a winter night
For the sake of somebody!
Och-hon for somebody!
Och-hey for somebody!
I could range the world around
For the sake of somebody!

"Ye powers that smile on virtuous love,
Oh! sweetly smile on somebody;
Frae ilka danger keep him free,
And send me safe my somebody!
Och-hon for somebody!
Och-hey for somebody;
I wad do—what wad I not,
For the sake of somebody!"

Just as her voice ceased, the garden gate swung open, and William Grahame advanced with long steps to the door; he went in without detecting poor Gilbert, who heard his loud cheery voice calling for his "bonnie birdie" the moment he was within the house. Soon after, the curtains were drawn close over the window, the cordial fire shine was gone from the lawn, and Gilbert was alone in the winterly garden.

He returned slowly to the busy city streets.

XLIX.

Many a summer and winter night went by, ere Gilbert Massenger again set foot on English ground. The next day he sailed for the New World, vaguely trusting to find there a new life. By his aunt's death he was raised above the need of toil; but he chose out rugged paths in search of forgetfulness. It was not society he wanted; therefore he soon abandoned the haunts of men: all was too similar

to what he had left behind, to promise distraction. He struck into the far West; he wandered to the very outskirts of civilization, and there set up his rest. The settlers here were few: men who, like himself, had fled from the hum of cities to nature's solitudes: for safety, perhaps, some; but from weariness more. They were "mighty hunters" all: stalwart, bronzed, bearded men, who had acquired the reckless freedom of savages by their long exemption from restraint. Their life was without luxury as without trammels: hard, toilsome, dangerous, as that of civilization's pioneers must always be.

It suited Gilbert well: his strong, ardent character found expansion in its wild adventures and perfect liberty. He built his log-house on the outskirts of a great pine forest, in whose black recesses the men of the settlement hunted animals, only one degree more savage and solitary and lawless than themselves. He chose to place his dwelling at some miles from any other; he raised it without help, and then sat down in his surly independence, resolved to keep aloof from strange companionship

as long as possible. He wished to commune with his own spirit, and to be still.

One evening, however, as he was sitting on a rude bench fashioned out of a pine-log, by the door of his hut, a visitor appeared.

Gilbert's dwelling faced the south-west, where the sun was going down in its glory behind a distant line of mountains. Forest extended behind and on either hand for unexplored miles: the silence was as of a newly created world. He had brought out the little worn Bible, intending to read, when he perceived three huge dogs scouring the plain, and heard a shrill whistle; on looking in the direction whence the sound proceeded, he saw a man advancing; he got up and went to meet him. From his greeting, the stranger was English, like himself. His second question was, "Have you brought any papers?"

"Yes."

"That is well. No news from the outer world ever reaches us here except when a fresh settler arrives, which happens but rarely."

They returned to the pine bench, and then,

before resting thereon, the stranger gave his own name, Hurst Livingston, and asked that of the other. This ceremony over, he offered tobacco; on the rejection of which by Gilbert, he remarked that he would either be obliged to smoke or he would go melancholy. Seeing the Bible on the bench, he took it up, and asked, "Have you books, too?" but on perceiving what it was, he replaced it with a sardonic grin, and a curious side-glance at his new acquaintance; which did not disconcert Gilbert in the least.

"There are some in the house behind, which you can have," replied he, quietly grasping the old volume.

"Your waggon must have been fairly loaded if you have imported many such luxuries. Did you travel alone?"

"No; I had an Indian guide and a back-woodsman, who was tired of his location, as he called it: both left me about fifty miles beyond the river; one to go southward where the land is better, and the guide to return to his station. He made me over to a settler who had met him to exchange skins for brandy and tobacco."

"I know the fellow; he is keen as a sleuth-hound. You intend to stay, then: you are in earnest?"

"Yes: do many come and go away again?"

"More go after a few weeks' trial than remain: only the wildest, or the most desperate, fight through even a year. I have been here six, and I have seen a score at least beaten: they like more company and less danger than they can get here. This is not a pastoral life: a man should have a quick eye and iron nerves for it—and not too many scruples."

Hurst Livingston was a man of nearly double Gilbert's age; tall, gaunt, and with a bitterly cynical expression of eye. He looked liked one who had taken his fill of the world's experience, and many a deep draught of its choice dissipations, before he had abandoned it: possibly its cup was almost dry, or it had grown stale and flavourless, before he flung it aside for the purer draught of nature's well.

"*You*," added he, with another sneer at the dark, little book; "*you* will be a saint amongst us."

"Don't *you* believe it?" demanded Gilbert point blank, with a gesture indicating the Bible.

"No more than I believe the Talmud or the Koran, or any other book that was ever written," wes the unhesitating reply.

"I should not dare to stay in this solitude did I not," said the other, grasping it with both hands.

"There are worse solitudes in Europe's busiest capitals than here. We have the range of the forest and the prairie: there are my dogs—truer friends never were—I can go out in the morning without a care but for my day's hunting. I encounter no old acquaintance who turn their backs on me: nobody who thrusts his hands down into his pockets and bows me a distant good-day, or looks purposely at the sky to avoid seeing me. No: there is no heart-burning here for injustice of that sort. That God should suffer such things to be and never right the innocent!"

A dark, fierce shade passed over Hurst Livingston's face as he spoke. Gilbert was silent. His companion seemed much disturbed: he rose from

the bench, took a turn or two and came back; his dogs ran at his call, fawning about his feet.

"You would follow a new master, Gwen," said he, caressing the largest and most magnificent of the three. "Yes, Gwen, you would go if he could give you a bigger bone than I: you'd snap at me if I tried to take it from you." The animal whined and looked wistfully in his master's face, as if he understood the unjust suspicion and protested against it. "Ay, Gwen, if you could speak you would vow to follow me the world over, through life till death—but it is best not to try either dogs or men so far: they have the most friends who never *need* one."

Gilbert knew enough of human nature by this time to be sure that when an individual has a quarrel with all humanity, he must have wronged it; outraged its laws, may be, or rebelled against its claims: by some perversion of reasoning he may bring himself to the belief that he is the injured person, but few or none will side with him.

This was not Hurst Livingston's last visit: he

seemed to conceive a relish for Gilbert Massenger's society, and came again and again. Yet, two characters more dissimilar, except in the one point of personal courage, could not be. Livingston soon drew from Massenger the salient passages of his history; but on his own he was extremely reserved. What could be gathered was merely conjectural—drawn from the bitter, cynical generalities which occasionally overflowed from his resentful, suffering memory.

L.

Gilbert Massenger had not been long settled in his solitary mode of life, when circumstances threw it into the power of Hurst Livingston to render him a signal service. It was very rarely that marauding parties of Indians visited this settlement; for the men thereof were not to be meddled with lightly, and their reputation had gone before them into the wilds. Their log-houses stood near together, on the bank of a river well supplied with

fish; but Gilbert, having chosen to build his nearer the forest, had not the protection of numbers. Livingston had represented to him the temerity of thus, as it were, inviting an attack; but he had declined moving, certain that he could defend himself in any danger of that kind.

For some days he had observed a single Indian slinking about his neighbourhood; but as there were several down at the settlement, he supposed him to be one of these, and the circumstance gave him no alarm. One evening, however, as he and Livingston were resting on the pine log before the hut, on their return from hunting, with their dogs about them, the same man was seen by Gilbert to advance stealthily a few paces out of the forest, and then to retire. He did not even yet see cause for uneasiness, and went on talking. Suddenly a bullet whistled close past his cheek, almost grazing it.

"Those Indian devils!" cried Livingston, starting to his feet and looking round with alert eye. "Come in—no—there they are: a score at least!" and raising his rifle, he took a long steady

aim; the foremost of the Indians fell—the rest paused.

They had expected only one enemy, and they found a second, whose ferocity and fearlessness they had proved before; while they stood, another deadly shot stretched a second on the ground.

"Fire! Massenger: why don't you fire?" cried Livingston fiercely. "When savages make war on us we must be savages.—Fire!—Look! they are making for the woods: why are you letting them escape? After them, Gwen!—Away, Blackfoot!" The dogs bounded off at his word; Gwen sprang on a tall man and was on the point of dragging him to the ground, when a shot from another Indian laid him dead.

"I'll avenge thee, my trusty Gwen!" shouted his master; and he would have rushed off in pursuit, had not Gilbert held him back.

"Let the miserable cowards go," said he: "they are twenty to two."

"*You* are not swift to shed blood," returned Livingston in a taunting voice.

"I am not," was the cold reply.

"It is of no use to show mercy. You can only govern those devils by fear," said Hurst Livingston. "They know me: fifty would have run as readily, for they have had it proved that I never point my rifle without bringing down my man; and I have no more compunction in shooting them than if they were so many head of game. They have cost me Gwen this time: it shall go hard but I'll have my revenge."

There was a tawny light in Livingston's eyes, as, keeping cautious watch on the darkling forest, they crossed to where the dog lay. The body of the first Indian who fell was near it; the other lay on his face several yards off. Gilbert approached him, and, stooping down, perceived that he still lived. He called to Livingston to help him to carry him to the hut.

"Let him die—there will be one fiend the less," was his answer. "What would you help him for?"

"You would not leave him here to die?"

"Indeed but I would. Gwen is worth ten of the red devils."

"Then I must manage alone," said Gilbert, and taking a flask of spirits from his pocket he forced a little between the Indian's clenched teeth. After a while the wounded savage recovered sensibility so far as to crawl, with Gilbert's aid, towards the house: he seemed to comprehend that kindness was intended him, and went without resistance; but his wound was mortal, and during the course of the night he died. Livingston sat by, watching the gradual approach of dissolution, as if it were some curious mechanical result of ordinary causes: he was perfectly callous, and seemed to regret his dog more than anything else. As for wishing his fatal shot unfired, such a thought never entered his mind.

LI.

After the failure of this first attempt, Gilbert Massenger enjoyed a perfect immunity from the attacks of the Indians. This was owing, probably, to the presence of Livingston; who, finding his friend obstinate in remaining where he was aban-

doned the village by the river, and constructed for himself a log-house near his.

Time now slid silently away from Gilbert, the change of seasons being its only waymarks; except a very rare journey eastward to fetch newspapers and letters, which Mr. Lawton still continued to forward to him from England. He could never be prevailed on to sever this cold and formal tie to mother-country, though Livingston sneered at him for retaining it.

"Let the old world go altogether," said Livingston: "while I see you hankering after it so often, I am in perpetual fear of losing your company."

But after each weary tramp, he saw him constantly return, until near a score of years had gone by. During this long period of solitude, the home sickness had come over Gilbert more than once; but he resolutely struggled against it until it seemed finally laid. The season of youth, with its high hopes and stormy passions, was gone from him; a certain passive contentment with his lot was now his: he was not unwilling to live and die in this wilderness: as well there as elsewhere,

since there was in the world beyond it, for him, absolutely nothing either to wish or to enjoy.

Two or three names of old acquaintances had meanwhile risen into a degree of notoriety that astonished him: this he learnt from the papers. First was that of Noel Forester: he had entered Parliament soon after Gilbert left England, and had distinguished himself by taking the popular side in many questions of social reform, which he consistently upheld. That his character had acquired a new element of strength was certain, or else that some good influence was perpetually guiding and ennobling it. His reputation, if not brilliant, was worthy and respectable; he was really acting a part in his day and generation, of use beyond his private interests. Jasper Lowndes also had risen to fame as a prolific writer; and others of Ashton Grammar-school had become men of mark.

But one name never was named—indeed, why should it be so; he knew not whether Helen still lived, or whether she had "gone home" before him: nor of her uncles had he any tidings. He

did not dare to ask Mr. Lawton in his letters, lest he should lose the pleasant company she still was in his thoughts, by learning that she was dead, or married. Mittie enclosed to him yearly a lengthy scrawl, but she scrupulously avoided reference to the troublous past, and filled the sheet chiefly with urgent entreaties that he would return home to gladden her eyes once more before she departed. After many times deferring it, Gilbert at last wrote to ask her if she knew anything of Doctor Grahame, his brother, or his niece. He started a month earlier on his eastward journey when he expected a reply. None, however, had come, and he lingered several weeks in the hope of its arrival; for, once having yielded to the impulse of curiosity concerning Helen, he thirsted impatiently for its gratification. At length Mittie's answer came.

"Dr. Grahame and Mr. William live together now," she wrote. "The Doctor has given up the school, and seems to be failing, but his brother is good for many a year yet. They are over at Langhope Tower oft with Miss Helen—she was

married to Mr. Forester nigh upon fifteen years since, and they have a beautiful family. I saw her in the town only last week with her son, as fine a slip of a lad as ever was, with a bit of a gold band round his cap, and bright buttons. He is a sailor in the Queen's service, I am told, and his mother's heart may be full proud of him, and is. She has a girl, too, who is a real rose, and a little boy of only a year old. She has buried two children, which must have been sore grief to her. She is a very good woman, and kind to poor folks; she has caused a deal to be done for them at Langhope. I have not liked to tell you of it before, on account of the pain it might be, but whenever I see either her or her husband they always ask about my master, and when he is coming back to England. 'Tell him, Mittie, I have taught my children to love him,' she said one day when they were with her, 'and I want to show them to him.' Now I tell you, Gilbert, will you come?"

No: he was inexpressibly pained, saddened, and astonished. She had either never known, or had

forgotten what his love for her had been: she was, like all women, changeful, inconstant. He almost resented her being happy; he was vexed at himself for having worshipped her memory during so many years that she had been devoted to his old rival, a contented wife and mother, living through her round of little duties and cares, with placid, easy mind. This was the first gust of passionate feeling; but as he took his way westward, alone, a better mood came over him, and he acknowledged to himself that he would not have made her life a sacrifice for him had it lain in his power.

There was now one feeling pervading his spirit that always at length subdued rebellious thoughts. Hurst Livingston called him fanatical; but his religion was no harsh bigotry, it was a saving faith: thus upheld, he could neither repine nor suffer long, seeing that he looked beyond earth for his ultimate satisfaction. The grisly fear which pursued him from England, had left him in the wilderness: its mists had never fallen nearer upon him, and in the clear light of piety they had dispersed entirely. He was as strong

and acute in mind as he was vigorous in body: this was ease to him. He believed that had he yielded to the over-mastering force of passion in his temptation, the curse would have descended on him in all its degradation; but now it was held off. God had heard his prayers, and accepted his sacrifice. Gertrude Massenger's stern example had its fruit: it was not wasted.

LII.

The Indian summer was nearly gone when Gilbert reached his forest home again. Hurst Livingston had dreaded, from his prolonged absence, that he would return no more; he therefore greeted him with expressions of pleasure, which made the other feel that to one individual in the wide world his presence was a consolation. Their minds were of the same strain originally, but Livingston's was warped and out of tune: it gave forth now few tones that were not harsh and discordant. Of late he had

sunk into a settled gloom: age was coming upon him; his heart was bating of its high courage, his arm of its strength; yet he had an awful shrinking from death: its contemplation was terrific to him. His companion endeavoured to lead him gently to what alone gives peace in its prospect; but he turned from it with scorn and hatred. His dark day was drawing to its dark end; the shadow of it already was creeping up to him and covering him.

"Massenger," said he to his friend as they paced before the hut one evening at sunset, "you are comparatively ignorant of life:—you don't know a tithe of the evil there is in the world."

"Possibly not."

"It is marvellous that God has not sent fire to consume it, as He did upon the cities of the plain. Yet He leaves it and the wicked in prosperity."

"But the day of His wrath will come."

"It is long deferred."

"So, frequently, is individual punishment; but it overtakes men at the last."

Livingston quickened his steps; his fiery eye glanced quickly and suspiciously at his companion.

After a few more turns he left him suddenly and entered his hut.

That was the last time Gilbert Massenger saw him alive. He was missing on the morrow when Gilbert went to join him: his dogs and his rifle were gone. No suspicion was roused then, though he rarely went to the woods alone; but as he did not return that night nor the following, and the men of the village had neither seen nor heard anything of him, a search was made. His body was found within the forest; he was lying on his face, shot through the heart; his gun, still loaded, lay within reach of his hand; one dog had been killed, and the other was badly wounded. It had dragged itself to its master's side, and kept watch over him. A trail of blood guided the seekers to a spot where an Indian had expired.

No elucidation of the circumstances of Livingston's death ever transpired; but it seemed probable that he had fallen a victim to the revenge of his inveterate enemies, the Indians. Like his life, his end was enveloped in mystery.

This tragedy disgusted Gilbert with his forest

existence: he missed his comrade; the wilderness grew terrible to him.

One night he said to himself suddenly, "I will leave this place: I will go home."

LIII.

It was a bleak December night in Ashton-le-Forde; the mist hung thick over the river and the moss, whence it rose like a cloud; the fine penetrating rain continued to fall as it had fallen all day. On the ancient bridge stood Gilbert Massenger, looking down at the reflection of the solitary oil-lamp which glimmered faintly on the water like a half-extinguished star. The Grammar-school showed dimly through the slanting rain in a heavy shapeless mass; the church beyond was quite veiled in mist. At intervals a few red sparks, environed by a lurid haze, marked the course of the High Street and the way to the square; the houses were scarcely visible in their upper stories. Gilbert smiled to himself as he passed along by the

quaint, over-hanging fronts. All appeared smaller, more insignificant than formerly: the pavement looked narrower; the streets mere tortuous alleys; the market-place itself little and mean. Yet his heart warmed to them: it was home, after all!

His ponderous step woke every echo of the quiet streets; the shops were not yet closed, and gossiping neighbours at occasional doors stared after him with open-mouthed wonderment: his great height, his dark-bearded face, and singular dress denoted a stranger; two long-limbed dogs strode wearily after him, and the mysterious trio disappeared into the unillumined fog of Lowgate.

He came to the old house; his foot was on the worn step; the reluctant knocker fell from his hand with one sullen thud, which reverberated noisily through the untenanted dwelling: he listened; a step dragged itself slowly up the passage from the kitchen; the chain was unloosed, the bolts drawn, the key turned rustily in the lock—a hand heavy with age was at work there. The door was opened wide. "Master, is it you? I can scarcelings see," asked Mittie's voice in an eager, quick, tremulous tone.

"Yes, Mittie, it is I: come home at last."

"I knew you'd come: I always said so. I've listened for you night by night for many a year; and I never wearied, for I knew you'd hanker after the old place as long as life was in you!"

They were in the dark hall now, but a rich, warm glow shone across it from the kitchen fire. Gilbert strode in there, followed by his dogs, and cast himself wearily on the long, cushioned settle which stood in the chimney corner. His companions sat upon the hearth, sniffing the warmth gratefully, and testifying a lively disposition for appreciating the comfortable home to which they had been so unexpectedly introduced. Quick-eyed, grim, uncanny beasts they were; the old servant gazed at them and their master through dim, tear-glassed eyes: all three were so uncivilized and heathenish of aspect that she half distrusted them.

"They are quiet, but hungry, Mittie: give them something to eat," suggested her master, observing the disfavour with which she regarded the animals. Quickly recovering herself, she ministered with affectionate haste to their wants and his.

"Your own room is all ready for you, Gilbert; it has been waiting a long while," cried she, in a gush of feeling: "I've kept it bright and tidy always. Dear! I am glad! And they'll be fain to see you at Langhope when they hear you're come back!"

Gilbert winced; then, annoyed at his folly, he encouraged the old woman to talk on; which she did, fast and fluently. She reviewed all the events which had occurred in the town since he left it; told him who was dead; who married; who gone to settle elsewhere. External changes there were few or none, for Ashton-le-Forde was still stiff-necked and obstinate in its prejudices and bad habits. Gilbert's thoughts wandered often during the course of her erratic details; but his ear always quickened to the sound of one name—still of dearest interest to him.

"Mrs. Forester is a beautiful lady, and goodness itself!" said Mittie, with enthusiasm. "You can see her kind heart in her blithe face: she always has a smile or a word for one. She has had her share of troubles, too; but they haven't hardened

her, and couldn't. Two of her boys she lost in a fever that broke out at the school: fine lads they were. She came to the Doctor's to nurse them herself, instead of taking them home; because of the others who might have caught it from them: but they both died. I have heard that she said, after they were gone, that it was God's mercy took them away, for she was learning to set her heart on her children altogether. And who knows but it was a mercy both to them and her? They are buried in Langhope churchyard. The Doctor and Mr. William took on sadly for them: poor old gentlemen!" Mittie paused for a minute to wipe her eyes, and then proceeded to tell that Noel Forester was now member for Ashton-le-Forde; his father being dead.

"He is a good man, is Mr. Forester; all the townsfolk like him, though they won't hearken to his plans for mending them. They stick to their old ways; and I do think myself they 're best. I 'm not for upsetting things because they are out of fashion."

Mittie was a staunch opponent of all new-fangled

schemes: she was one great prejudice from top to toe, and a very fair representative of Ashton theories; only a kernel of kind heart kept her from virulence. It was the member's frankness, and his interest in her master, that had won the old servant's golden opinion; for in her private thoughts she abominated the innovations he had tried hard to introduce: such as ragged-schools, wash-houses, and baths. "Wasn't there the river for them that wanted water?" she would say; "and as for education, poor folks were better without it."

At length her tongue ceased: not that either it or her gossip was exhausted, but because her master showed signs of weariness. She advised him to go to bed and get a long sleep; but he declined, saying he should remain where he was some hours longer, but she might leave him. This she did, after first proposing to turn out the dogs; to which their master said, "No; they will not do any harm." Mittie thought he had brought back queer ways with him wherever he had sojourned; visions of dirty paw-marks on her spotless floors harassed her mind even in her dreams.

"I should not wonder if he were to let them follow him up-stairs," said she before dropping to sleep. "Missis would be vexed if she knew: her so particular and careful. And his beard, it is quite wicked and heathenish."

LIV.

This was his welcome home. To this end had come his early hopes and mature ambitions. It seems a gloomy, unsatisfying result, so far as we can discern; but his countenance, as he sat silent by the pleasant fire, said not so. He was grave and still, but not sad: indeed, his heart was lifted up with thankfulness. He had come back burdened with no remorse; harassed by no guilty memory; pursued by no carking cares or fears. Instead, he had the calm and strong spirit of a man who, having subdued himself, dreads no small temptations; shrinks from no light trials that may be laid up for him yet in the closed hand of the future. On his temples the once thick curls are scant and gray; his face is bronzed by long ex-

posure; but his deep, dark eyes have a soft, pleasant lustre, and his lips, though compressed, are not stern. In the lines that traverse his brow you may trace the imprint of sorrow past: time cuts not so deeply or so harshly. Yet since those furrows were made, the tender finger of resignation has gone over and half effaced them: the reflex of inward peace has quietened the restless, eager glance. For no present joy, for no earthly reward he craves, though life is still strong in his heart: no touch of weakness or failing will come upon him for years; but he is content with his blank fate, and thanks God it is a blank. His thoughts are with Helen—the good wife, the tender mother. She might have been his: her love might have been his. He regrets no longer: both she and he are happier apart. What bitter days of mourning they might have wept through together, had he succumbed to the passionate pleadings of his heart! What miserable anxieties would have dogged their pathway! But all this is avoided: his self-denial has spared Helen and saved himself. He has cause to thank God, indeed; for his lot might have been very dark.

LV.

When Mittie descended from her room the next morning, she found the two formidable dogs couched watchfully across their master's door; they got up immediately and made overtures of friendship (remembering the hand that had fed them last night), and followed her down stairs, in the hope of good entertainment again; the old woman beguiled them to the garden door, and, instead, shut them out in the drizzling dawn. This treacherous proceeding raised an awful clamour: all Lowgate resounded to the deep-mouthed bay of the injured animals. The noise awoke Gilbert, then falling into his first sleep; he understood the matter at once, but not being disposed to yield up his faithful comrades to Mittie's tyranny, he dressed, went down, and let them in.

At work in the kitchen, the old servant heard them patter up-stairs again, and wisely vowed, though much aggravated, to meddle no more with

her master's favourites, let them go where they would. This resolve was sagacious; for he was not a man to be ruled by an old woman, and valued his dogs only a degree less than if they had been Christians. When he entered the parlour, where breakfast was prepared, and a glorious fire blazing in the grate, they took instant possession of the hearth-rug, and lazily blinked defiance at their routed foe. Mittie looked chilling and dignified. "Who could have thought he would bring creatures such as these home?" was her thought. Gilbert undertook to propitiate her.

"You would never have seen me again, but for Bruno," said he, patting the taller of the two hounds on the head affectionately.

"You don't say so, master!"

"Indeed, I do; and, Mittie, I have a great favour for him."

"Well, Gilbert, I don't say you oughtn't to; but he is a real savage, heathen beast."

"Yes—if any one were to lay a finger on me, he would fly at them in anything but a Christian way."

"He looks like it; so I wonder why you bring him here, where nobody wants to harm you."

"Why, Mittie, would *you* throw over an old attached servant because his working day was gone?—not you: I know you better than to suspect that." The ancient woman smiled; she regarded Bruno more placidly—with a sort of respect, indeed, when she heard such a high character of him. "He is as gentle as a lamb, usually, but he is not used to harsh treatment; neither is Mignon. 'Love me, love my dogs,' Mittie. They have been trusty followers of mine for years, and they are entitled to a warm corner and their daily food to the end of their lives: if I die first I shall pension them."

"*Surely*, master." Mittie's *surely* was very significant; it meant "Don't quarter them on me." Gilbert laughed and applied himself to his breakfast, administering occasional morsels to his dogs, according to custom.

There was a pale winterly sunshine in the room which betrayed every stain and rent in the faded, old furniture. No single article had been renewed:

all was as he remembered it in boyhood; only considerably grayer, duskier and shabbier. The portrait of his ancestress alone showed bright in colour, and youthful in feature; its brilliant eyes, as of old, were full upon him: their expression annoyed him still, for it excited painful thoughts; and, his meal over, he removed it from the wall. Mittie on coming in observed the change.

"What have you done with the old picture, master?" she asked sharply, jealous of every trespass on her dead mistress's fancies.

"It is there by the door: I am going to carry it up into my aunt's room."

"Well, but *she* liked it best *there*;" pointing to the clean, unfaded paint of the place where it had hung.

Gilbert made no reply, but taking the portrait in his hands, walked up stairs, with Bruno and Mignon following. All three entered the room formerly occupied by Miss Massenger. The bed, the chairs, the tables, were littered over with clothing of various kinds. Gowns of discoloured, mildewed satin and silk, faded shawls, yellow lace,

were strewn about in every available place. The intruder paused bewildered, and ordered the dogs to lie down. Mittie came bustling up.

"Oh, master! what are you going to do?" cried she, almost crying; "do come out of here: I had spread her things out to air only yesterday; they would get moth-eaten else."

"What are they all?"

"What are they? can't you see? They are Miss Gertrude's wedding clothes. Once a year, as long as she lived, she used to take them out of her wardrobe to air; and since she died I have always done it too, because I knew she would not like it neglected. See, she was to have been married in these things."

Gilbert looking, saw a robe of what had once been a rich white satin, now specked, tarnished, and lustreless; beside it lay a veil and shawl of filmy lace, and a broad hat of white chip with a feather, all of the same decayed hue as the gown. He set down the picture with its face to the wall and retreated hastily, without speaking; but this incident decided him in a project which had been hovering in his mind all the morning:

he would let this haunted house and seek a more cheerful abode without the town: it was more than he was prepared to endure, to have buried sorrows resuscitated thus; and so long as Mittie remained within their influence, her master's will would always be set aside for her revered mistress's old customs. He returned to the parlour and sat down to write a note to Mr. Lawton on the subject.

Scarcely was this completed when there came a loud ring at the door bell. Mittie went to open.

"Your master has arrived, I hear, Mittie?" said a high, pleasant voice.

"Yes, sir."

"May I come in?"

"He has not given any order, sir, but I will ask."

Gilbert strode to the parlour door, and went out into the hall.

"By all means, Forester, you are very welcome," said he, and extended his hand; which the other grasped warmly, and went on shaking it with fervour, until they were seated.

"This makes me happy, Massenger: but where

is Willie? I'm forgetting him. Come forward, sir: this is my son."

"How do you do, uncle?" said the lad frankly, putting out his hand, which Gilbert shook in silence: there was a tone in his voice so like his mother's, that for an instant he was struck mute: recovering himself instantly, he inquired after Helen.

"How is your mother, Willie? Forester, he reminds me of her in the face."

"Yes; all the children have her eyes."

"I have a message for you, Uncle Gilbert:" interposed the boy. "My mother said we were not to show our faces at Langhope again, unless we carried a promise from you to her that you will come to us to-morrow and stay till after Christmas: she says one day is enough by yourself. The Doctor is there, and Uncle William."

"Tell your mother I will come, Willie; thank her for the pleasantest welcome back to England I have had—or shall have:" he paused, afraid to say too much, yet unwilling to be cool where such evident cordiality was meant.

It was a quick, kind, womanly instinct which

had prompted Helen to send her son with his father: he was going off alone when she called him back. "Take Willie, Noel; Mr. Massenger will like to see him," said she.

Her ambassador was well chosen: none other could have shown so well the immense gulf betwixt the past and the present. Twenty years of absence in Gilbert's memory were only as twenty days; he saw glassed in it the fresh, pleasant, beaming face of seventeen — tenderness and archness mingled: its exquisite purity and youthful loveliness and girlish grace unchanged; but this tall handsome boy suggested a difference. Willie was so far like her as to recall these traits: in looking at his frank, open brow and honest eyes, Helen rose up like a vision before him—the parlour at Norwood, the winterly garden, the stolen visit. Yet were they each and all—not effaced—but dimmed by the boy's idea: they fell back into indistinctness; they grew unreal. In one short quarter of an hour he passed from the old dream-land of sweet memories to the clear vivid things of to-day: Helen was no more

the half child, half angel that had divided his passionate thoughts with Heaven, but the tranquil wife, the holy matron, the mother of children, the centre and star of a happy home. One regret, one sigh stirred his heart: they were the last quivering of pain given to that old sacrifice; then he planted his foot firmly, steadfastly on the hither side of the gap, and felt that he could meet Helen as she would be met.

"For her, the present is all in all," said he to himself: "while I have fought my silent battle without advancing, she has lived, suffered, and loved, and the years have gone on with her. Had one regret stayed with her, she would not have sent me her son."

LVI.

Christmas Eve.

The bells of Langhope church are ringing loudly from the old tower, waking every echo of wood and hill, park and moorland. In Ezekiel Skirle's ancient hall the antique lustres and silver sconces are lighted; the antlered heads of deer

that decorate the panels over the lofty mantels, are half buried in glossy holly gemmed with scarlet drops, and look as if they were forcing their way through a tangled brake with the fierce dogs on their traces. The painted window has become a green bower: outside it is winter, wild, windy, drifting up with snow; but within all is genial glow, fragrant warmth, and Yule-tide rejoicing.

It is a family gathering of old and young; Noel Forester always keeps his Christmas thus, as did his father before him. The huge logs are piled high on the hearths, whence showers of sparks dance up the chimneys, not more briskly than light feet dance over the floor. Gushes of real heart-laughter may be heard in pauses of the music, and pleasant voices, which ring out free, fresh, and silvery, from spirits to which Care and Sorrow are yet myths of no import whatever.

The seniors are gathered in groups about either fireplace. One consists of Grandmama Forester, the Doctor, and Uncle William; they are talking at intervals, and contemplating the merry scene with sedate pleasure. Noel Forester joins them

and his mother directs his pleased attention to the queen of the night, his daughter, whose beauty and grace and childish modesty mark her Helen's own child. William Grahame is still erect in a green old age, but his brother is bent and worn.

There is a second group a little apart, quite in the glow of the hearth;—Helen is its centre. Helen, still fair of face, benign in expression, ripened into full matronly loveliness, with the same shining eyes and quiet brow; but changed—how changed none see but Gilbert Massenger. He is beside her, speaking gravely and earnestly: his bronzed face is calm and unmoved. Helen's youngest boy has climbed into her lap, and, with dewy scarlet lips apart, and soft breathings, has fallen asleep with his golden head on her bosom. Willie stands behind her chair with his hand on his mother's neck, listening intently to the traveller's talk, and thinking that Uncle Gilbert (so have Helen's children been taught to call him) is the grandest-looking fellow in the world. During the evening Gilbert watches Helen;—he sees in her the glory and crown of a household; the stay of

the old, the joy of the young, the very pride and happiness of her husband's life. Every old rebellious thought lies hushed and mute in his breast. "God bless her—God keep her—God preserve her to them all for many more happy Christmases!" is his silent prayer.

LVII.

Christmas morning in the churchyard. The snow lies deep over the graves; hangs feathery on the broad fir-boughs; lies on the narrow ridges of the monuments. The people who are clustering under the porch, touch their caps and curtsey with civil "Merry Christmas" to the squire and his mother as they pass through into the church. Helen and Gilbert Massenger pause on the pathway with Willie and his sister. "My two boys lie buried here," says Helen, pointing to a palisaded corner of ground; her voice quivers, and her eyes brighten with tears, which some gladdening thought disperses ere they can fall. Gilbert looks far away over the snowy uplands seen from the raised path,

and there is a dimness over his vision, too, for an instant; but it clears away, and he says, "You will meet them again: they wait for you."

"Yes." And so they enter God's house together. Opposite the pew is a pure marble slab with two brief inscriptions: "Gilbert Forester, aged 11; Nugent Forester, aged 9." Where the mother sits, her eyes fall on her dead children's names. Sabbath by sabbath is she reminded—if indeed she could forget—that she has "two in heaven" dear to her, and as much her own as those who are left.

LVIII.

About mid-way between Ashton-le-Forde and Langhope Tower, there is a little nest of a house built of gray stone, and clustered about with flowers. There live Uncle Gilbert and Mittie, and the dogs. A sort of universal Uncle Gilbert he is: all the children have adopted him. They love his brown face; they are not frightened at his great beard; they pat the one and pull the other;

they climb on his knees, and demand stories, with all the natural selfishness and audacity of youth.

Often there rides up to his gate, on a little brown pony, a vision of the Deepdell Helen: she is his choice pet, his supreme favourite. She borrows his books—of which he has many now, some, perhaps, selected with a view to her; she culls his finest roses, and is firm friends with Bruno and Mignon, who patronize and protect her as if sharing their master's partiality, and understanding why she is preferred before the rest.

The young sailor, too, is often at Moor Cottage; for nobody loves a story of wild adventure more than he. An immense admiration has he conceived for Uncle Gilbert; whose name is wrought up into dimly remembered nursery-stories, and for whom his mother had taught him to pray as a child, saying, "Pray God bless papa and mama, brothers and sisters, Uncle Tom and Uncle William. Pray God bless Uncle Gilbert Massenger, and keep him from harm, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." And so Uncle Gilbert, who saved his papa's life, and did other great but unknown

deeds, is a hero to young Willie: he does not quite understand the relationship, but he is proud to belong to him in any sort, and contemplates him with a reverent affection which time will scarcely diminish.

The Doctor and his brother William, also, are to be found at the cottage frequently, and Gilbert himself is no rare guest in Polyglot Parlour. Mittie vows she has taken a new lease of her life—she might also add of her temper, which is considerably ameliorated: she is even benevolent to the dogs; and though her master *is* master in his own house, she is generally contented.

The ancient house in Lowgate is undergoing renovation, previously to being tenanted by a clergyman, with a vast number of children: these will exorcise its presiding spirits of gloom and dulness, if anything can.

There is a chance for Ashton-le-Forde at last. Some of the most obstinately prejudiced of the old generation have passed from their posts of authority in the town, and the member has prevailed on their successors to accede to the once quashed

plan of draining the unhealthy moss; which from time immemorial has gendered fevers and other contagious disorders. Gilbert Massenger has gone into the business with heart and soul, and—what is not less to the purpose—purse; so there is little risk that it will either lag, or fall through. The strong tastes of his early days are coming out again, and deep is the interest he takes in the great works of modern skill and ingenuity. He will not rest long a silent on-looker; he is eager once more to be active amongst active men: a sure sign that his return is not likely to renew old pains—indeed it has deadened their last sting.

LIX.

Yet one sketch more and I have done.

It is a still May evening, twilight is creeping over the sky; the fresh fields look gray with rising mist; there is a faint twittering of nest-ward bound loiterers on the wing, and a whisper of wind which seems to deepen, rather than break

the quiet. The parlour window at Moor Cottage is wide open; beside it, with his brow in his hand, sits Gilbert Massenger.

He is alone.

Remember this—he remembers it—it stills him, though it does not sadden; he must be alone often—most often. His sacrifice will end but with life, for his heart would have opened richly to home-ties and home affections; but they are not for him, nor ever shall be: he must live out his days thus. *Without* there are warm friends for him; *within* there is nothing—nothing he can gather in his arms and say, "It is mine."

Yet on his brow is no repining, in his eye no gloom, on his lip neither despondence nor complaint. He bears up with brave, honest, faithful soul. Having put his hand to the plough, let what sorrow will turn up in the furrows, he will not look back: he looks *up* instead, and there sees, afar off, what shall satisfy him.

At his elbow lies the old well-worn Bible; he takes it presently and reads; then the empty room, the solitary hearth, are forgotten. Soon it is too

dark to trace the print; he steps out upon the little lawn and goes down to the gate; thence he watches the moon rise over Langhope woods, and as it rides up into heaven he remembers a long-past scene at Norwood: a wet night, a changeful night, when he had questioned eagerly of the future and tried to see an omen in the clouds.

"Yes," said he aloud, "the light is enough for me. God, I thank thee that though earth's joys are withheld from me, thou hast given me thy Peace within."

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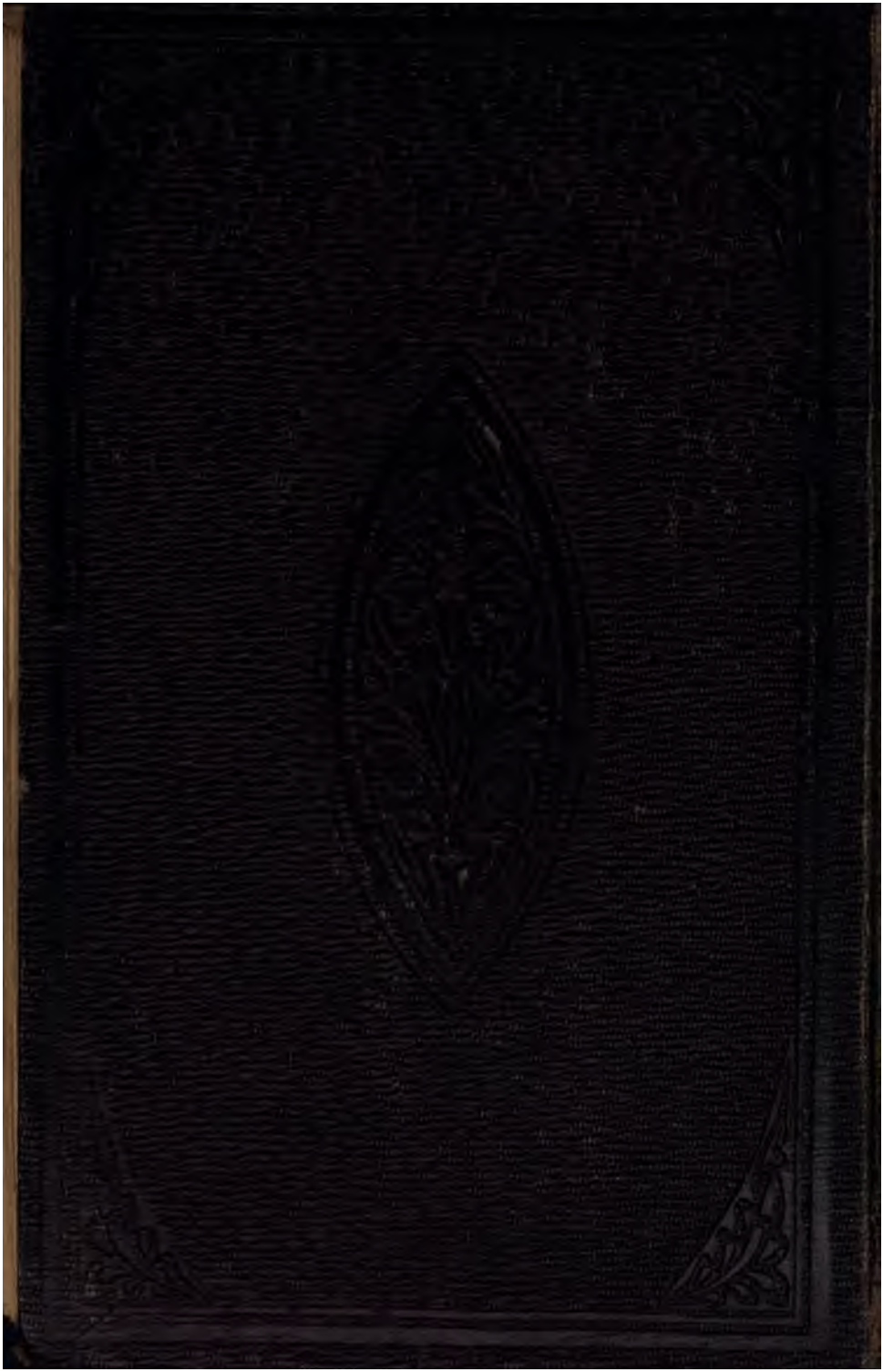
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